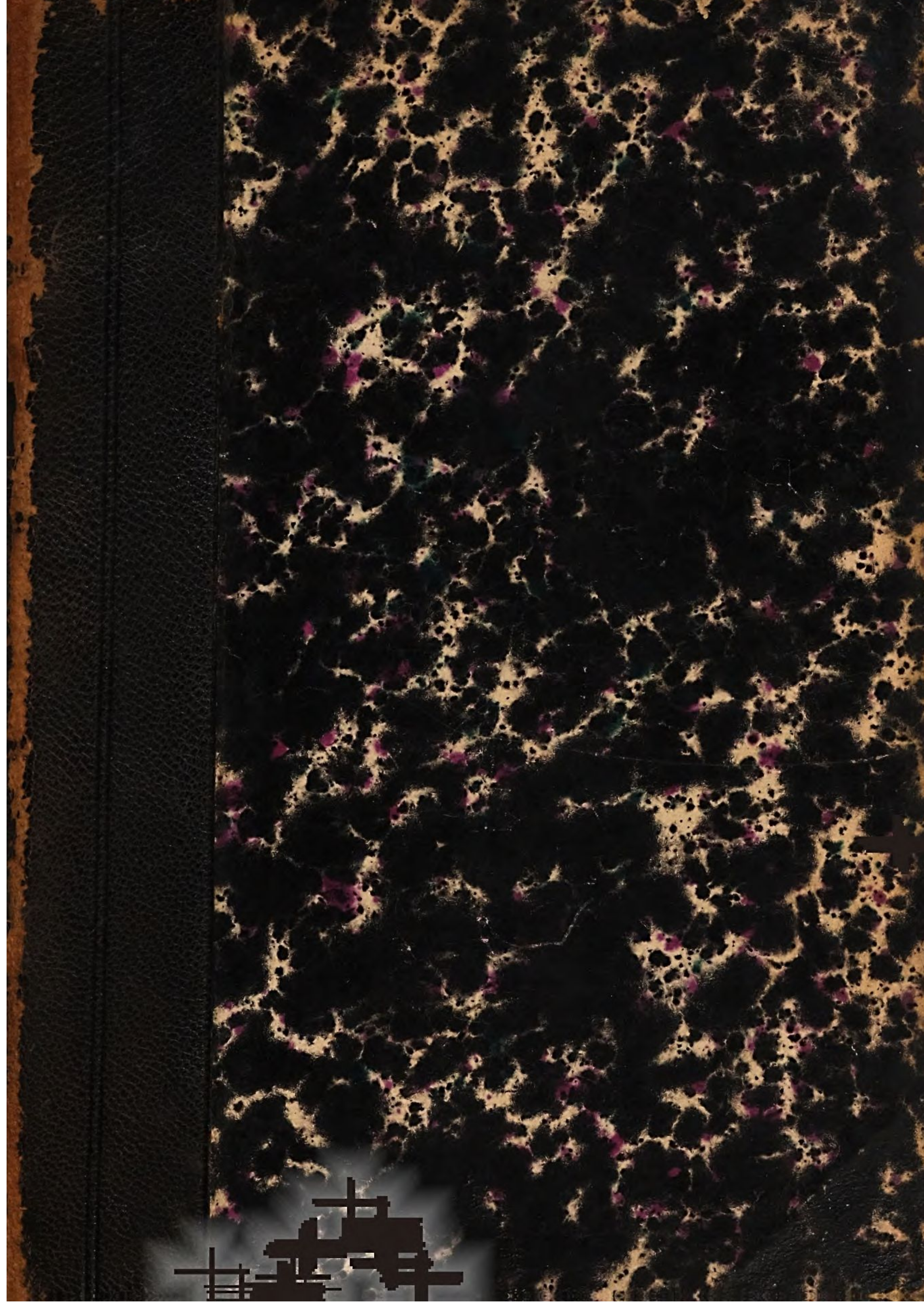




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THE STORY OF FRANCIS CLUDDE.

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 1.

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By the same Author,

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF 1 vol.



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OF
FRANCIS CLUDDE.

BY
STANLEY J. WEYMAN,
AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.

THE STORY

OF FRANCIS CLUDD

STANLEY J. WOODMAN

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF THE WIND" AND "THE HOUSE OF THE FLOOD"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN R. WOODMAN

NEW YORK

1910

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THE STORY OF FRANCIS CLUDDE.

CHAPTER I.

“HÉ, SIRE ANE, HÉ!”

ON the boundary line between the two counties of Warwick and Worcester there is a road very famous in those parts, and called the Ridgeway. Father Carey used to say—and no better Latinist could be found for a score of miles round in the times of which I write—that it was made by the Romans. It runs north and south along the narrow spine of the country, which is spread out on either side like a map, or a picture. As you fare southwards you see on your right hand the green orchards and pastures of Worcestershire stretching as far as the Malvern Hills. You have in front of you Bredon Hill, which is a wonderful hill, for if a man goes down the Avon by boat it

goes with him—now before, and now behind—a whole day's journey, and then stands in the same place. And on the left hand you have the great Forest of Arden, and not much besides, except oak-trees, which grow well in Warwickshire.

I describe this road—firstly, because it is a notable one, and forty years ago was the only Queen's highway to call a highway in that country, the rest were mere horse-tracks; secondly, because the chase wall of Coton End runs along the side of it for two good miles; and the Cluddes—I am Francis Cludde—have lived at Coton End by the Ridgeway time out of mind; probably—for the name smacks of the soil—before the Romans made the road. And thirdly, because forty years ago, on a drizzling February day in 1555—second year of Mary, old religion just re-established—a number of people were collected on this road, forming a group of a score or more, who stood in an ordered kind of disorder about my uncle's gates and looked all one way, as if expecting an arrival, and an arrival of consequence.

First, there was my uncle, Sir Anthony, tall and lean. He wore his best black velvet doublet and cloak, and had put on with them an air of huge importance. This increased each time he turned, staff in hand, and surveyed his following,

and as regularly gave place to a “Pshaw!” of vexation and a petulant glance when his eye rested on me. Close beside him, looking important too, but anxious and a little frightened as well, stood Father Carey. The priest wore his silk cassock, and his lips moved from time to time without sound, as though he were trying over a Latin oration—which, indeed, was the fact. At a more respectful distance were ranged Baldwin Moor, the steward, and a dozen servants; while still further away lounged as many ragamuffins—landless men, who swarmed about every gentleman’s door in those times, and took toll of such abbey lands as the king might have given him. Against one of the stone gate pillars I leaned myself—nineteen years and six months old, and none too wise, though well grown, and as strong as one here and there. And perched on the top of the twin post, with his chin on his knees, and his hands clasped about them, was Martin Luther, the fool.

Martin had chosen this elevated position partly out of curiosity, and partly, perhaps, under a strong sense of duty. He knew that, whether he would or no, he must needs look funny up there. His nose was red, and his eyes were running, and his teeth chattering; and he did look funny. But

as he felt the cold most, his patience failed first. The steady, silent drizzle, the mist creeping about the stems of the oak-trees, the leaden sky, proved too much for him in the end. "A watched pot never boils!" he grumbled.

"Silence, sirrah!" commanded my uncle angrily. "This is no time for your fooling. Have a care how you talk in the same breath of pots and my Lord Bishop!"

"*Sanctae ecclesiae!*" Father Carey broke out turning up his eyes in a kind of ecstasy, as though he were knee to knee with the prelate; "*te defensore inclytum atque ardentem——*"

"*Pottum!*" cried I, laughing loudly at my own wit.

It was an ill-mannered word, but I was cold and peevish, having been forced to this function against my will. I had never seen the guest whom we were expecting, and who was no other than the Queen's Chancellor, Stephen Gardiner, but I disliked him as if I had. He was, in truth, related to us in a peculiar fashion, which my uncle and I naturally looked at from different stand-points. Sir Anthony viewed with complacence, if not with pride, any connection with the powerful Bishop of Winchester, for the knight knew the world, and could appreciate the value it sets on

success, and the blind eyes it has for spots, if they do but speckle the risen sun. I could make no such allowance, but, with the pride of youth and family, at once despised the great Bishop for his base blood, and blushed that the shame lay on our side. I hated this parade of doing honour to him, and would fain have hidden at home with Petronilla, my cousin, Sir Anthony's daughter, and awaited our guest there. The knight, however, had not permitted this, and I had been forced out, being in the worst of humours.

So I said, “*Pottum!*” and laughed.

“Silence, boy!” cried Sir Anthony, fiercely. He loved an orderly procession, and to arrange things decently. “Silence!” he repeated, darting an angry glance first at me and then at his followers, “or I will warm that jacket of yours, lad! And you, Martin Luther, see to your tongue for the next twenty-four hours, and keep it off my Lord Bishop! And, Father Carey, hold yourself ready——”

“For here Sir Hot-Pot cometh!” cried the undaunted Martin, skipping nimbly down from his post of vantage; “and a dozen of London saucepans with him, or may I never lick the inside of one again!”

A jest on the sauciness of London serving-

men was sure to tell with the crowd, and there was a great laugh at this, especially among the landless rascals, who were on the skirts of the party, and well sheltered from Sir Anthony's eye. He glared about him, provoked to find at this critical moment smiles where there should have been looks of deference, and a ring round a fool where he had marshalled a procession. Unluckily he chose to visit his displeasure upon me.

"You won't behave, won't you, you puppy!" he cried. "You won't, won't you!" and stepping forward he aimed a blow at my shoulders, which would have made me rub myself if it had reached me. But I was too quick. I stepped back, the stick swung idly, and the crowd laughed.

And there the matter would have ended, for the Bishop's party were now close upon us, had not my foot slipped on the wet grass and I fallen backwards. Seeing me thus at his mercy, the temptation proved too much for the knight. He forgot his love of seemliness—and even that his visitors were at his elbow—and, stooping a moment to plant home a couple of shrewd cuts, cried, "Take that! Take that, my lad!" in a voice that rang as crisply as his thwacks.

I was up in an instant; not that the pain was anything, and before our own people I should

have thought as little of shame, for if the old may not lay hand to the young, being related, where is to be any obedience? Now, however, my first glance met the grinning faces of strange lackeys, and while my shoulders still smarted, the laughter of a couple of soberly-clad pages stung a hundred times more sharply. I glared furiously round, and my eyes fell on one face—a face long remembered. It was that of a man who neither smiled nor laughed; a man whom I recognised immediately, not by his sleek hackney or purple cassock—which a riding-cloak partially concealed—or even by his jewelled hand, but by the keen glance of power which passed over me, took me in, and did not acknowledge me, which saw my humiliation without interest or amusement. The look hurt me beyond smarting of shoulders, for it conveyed to me in the twentieth part of a second how very small a person Francis Cludde was, and how very great a personage was Stephen Gardiner, whom in my thoughts I had presumed to belittle.

I stood irresolute a moment, shifting my feet and glowering at him, my face on fire. But when he raised his hand to give the Benediction, and the more devout, or those with mended hose, fell on their knees in the mud, I turned my back ab-

ruptly, and, climbing the wall, flung away across the chase.

"What, Sir Anthony!" I heard him say as I stalked off, his voice ringing clear and incisive amid the reverential silence which followed the Latin words; "have we a heretic here, cousin? How is this? So near home too!"

"It is my nephew, my Lord Bishop," I heard Sir Anthony answer, apology in his tone; "and a wilful boy at times. You know of him; he has queer notions of his own, put into his head long ago."

I caught no more, my angry strides carrying me out of earshot. Fuming and fretting, I hurried across the long damp grass, avoiding here and there the fallen limb of an elm or a huge round of holly. I wanted to get out of the way, and be out of the way; and made such haste that before the slowly-moving cavalcade had traversed one-half of the interval between the road and the house, I had reached the bridge which crossed the moat, and, pushing my way impatiently through the maids and scullions who had flocked to it to see the show, had passed into the courtyard.

The light was failing, and the place looked dark and gloomy in spite of the warm glow of burning logs which poured from the lower win-

dows, and some show of green boughs which had been placed over the doorways in honour of the occasion. I glanced up at the lattice in one of the gables—the window of Petronilla's little parlour. There was no face at it, and I turned fretfully into the hall—and yes, there she was, perched up in one of the high window-seats. She was looking out on the chase, as the maids were doing.

Yes, as the maids were doing. She too was watching for his High Mightiness, I muttered, and that angered me afresh. I crossed the rushes in silence, and climbed up beside her.

"Well," I said ungraciously, as she started, hearing me at her elbow—"well, have you seen enough of him yet, cousin? You will, I warrant you, before he leaves. A little of him goes far."

"A little of whom, Francis?" she asked simply.

Though her voice betrayed some wonder at my rough tone, she was so much engaged with the show that she did not look at me immediately. This of course kept my anger warm, and I began to feel that she was in the conspiracy against me.

"Of my Lord of Winchester, of course," I answered, laughing rudely—"of Sir Hot-Pot!"

"Why do you call him that?" she remonstrated in gentle wonder. And then she did turn her soft dark eyes upon me. She was a slender,

willowy girl in those days, with a complexion clear yet pale—a maiden all bending and gracefulness, yet with a great store of secret firmness, as I was to learn. “He seems as handsome an old man,” she continued, “as I have ever met, and stately and benevolent, too, as I see him at this distance. What is the matter with you, Francis? What has put you out?”

“Put me out!” I retorted angrily. “Who said anything had put me out?”

But I reddened under her eyes; I was longing to tell her all, and be comforted, while at the same time I shrank with a man’s shame from saying to her that I had been beaten.

“I can see that something is the matter,” she said sagely, with her head on one side, and that air of being the elder which she often assumed with me, though she was really the younger by two years. “Why did you not wait for the others? Why have you come home alone? Francis,” she cried, with sudden conviction, “you have vexed my father! That is it!”

“He has beaten me like a dog!” I blurted out passionately; “and before them all! Before those strangers he flogged me!”

She had her back to the window, and some

faint gleam of wintry sunshine, passing through the gules of the shield blazoned behind her, cast a red stain on her dark hair and shapely head. She was silent, probably through pity or consternation; but I could not see her face, and misread her. I thought her hard, and, resenting this, bragged on with a lad's empty violence.

"He did; but I will not stand it! I give you warning, I won't stand it, Petronilla!" and I stamped, young bully that I was, until the dust sprang out of the boards, and the hounds by the distant hearth jumped up and whined. "No! not for all the base bishops in England!" I continued, taking a step this way and that. "He had better not do it again! If he does, I tell you it will be the worse for some one!"

"Francis," she exclaimed abruptly, "you must not speak in that way! Stephen Gardiner is our guest."

But I was too angry to be silenced, though instinctively I changed my ground.

"And if he is!" I cried furiously. "Who is Stephen Gardiner, I should like to know? He has no right to call himself Gardiner at all! Dr. Stephens he used to call himself, I have heard. A child with no name but his godfather's: that is what he is, for all his airs and his bishopric! Who

is he to look on and see a Cludde beaten? If my uncle does not take care——”

“Francis!” she cried again, cutting me short ruthlessly. “Be silent, sir!”—and this time I was silent. “You unmanly boy,” she continued, her face glowing with indignation, “to threaten my father before my face! How dare you, sir? How dare you? And who are you, you poor child,” she exclaimed, with a startling change from invective to sarcasm—“who are you to talk of bishops, I should like to know?”

“One,” I said sullenly, “who thinks less of cardinals and bishops than some folk, Mistress Petronilla!”

“Ay, I know,” she retorted scathingly — “I know that you are a kind of half-hearted Protestant—neither fish, flesh, nor fowl!”

“I am what my father made me!” I muttered.

“At any rate,” she replied, “you do not see how small you are, or you would not talk of bishops. Heaven help us! That a boy who has done nothing and seen nothing, should talk of the Queen’s Chancellor! Go! Go out, you foolish boy, and rule a country, or cut off heads, and then you may talk of such men—men who could unmake you and yours with a stroke of the pen!

You, to talk so of Stephen Gardiner! Fie, fie, I say! For shame!”

I looked at her, dazed and bewildered, and had long afterwards in my mind a picture of her as she stood above me in the window bay, with her back to the light, her slender figure drawn to its full height, her hand extended towards me. I could scarcely understand or believe that this was my gentle cousin. I turned without a word, and stole away, not looking behind me. I was cowed.

It happened that the servants came hurrying in at the moment with a clatter of dishes and knives, and the noise covered my retreat. I had a fancy afterwards that as I moved away Petronilla called to me. But at the time, what with the confusion and my own disorder, I paid no heed to her, but got myself blindly out of the hall, and away to my own attic.

It was a sharp lesson. But my feelings, when, being alone, I had time to feel, need not be set down. After events made them of no moment, for I was even then on the verge of a change so great that all the threats and misgivings, the fevers and agues, of that afternoon, real as they seemed at the time, became in a few hours as

immaterial as the dew which fell before yesterday's thunderstorm.

The way the change began to come about was this. I crept in late to supper, facing the din and lights, the rows of guests and the hurrying servants, with a mixture of shame and sullenness. I was sitting down with a scowl next the Bishop's pages—my place was beside them, half-way down the table, and I was not too careful to keep my feet clear of their clothing—when my uncle's voice, raised in a harsher tone than was usual with him, even when he was displeased, summoned me.

"Come here, sirrah!" he cried roundly. "Come here, Master Francis! I have a word to speak to you!"

I went slowly, dragging my feet, while all looked up, and there was a partial silence. I was conscious of this, and it nerved me. For a moment, indeed, as I stepped on to the dais, I had a vision of scores of candles and rushlights floating in mist, and of innumerable bodiless faces all turned up to me. But the vision and the mistiness passed away, and left only my uncle's long thin face inflamed with anger, and beside it, in the same ring of light, the watchful eyes and stern impassive features of Stephen Gardiner. The

Bishop's face and his eyes were all I saw then; the same face, the same eyes, I remembered, which had looked unyielding into those of the relentless Cromwell and had scarce dropped before the frown of a Tudor. His purple cap and cassock, the lace and rich fur, the chain of office, I remembered afterwards.

"Now, boy," thundered Sir Anthony, pointing to the place where I should stand, "what have you to say for yourself? Why have you so misbehaved this afternoon? Let your tongue speak quickly, do you hear, or you will smart for it. And let it be to the purpose, boy!"

I was about to answer something—whether it was likely to make things worse or better, I cannot remember—when Gardiner stayed me. He laid his hand gently on Sir Anthony's sleeve, and interposed. "One moment," he said mildly; "your nephew did not stay for the Church's blessing, I remember. Perhaps he has scruples. There are people nowadays who have. Let us hear if it be so."

This time it was Sir Anthony who did not let me answer. "No, no," he cried hastily—"no, no; it is not so. He conforms, my lord, he conforms. You conform, sir," he continued, turning fiercely upon me, "do you not? Answer, sir,"

"Ah!" the Bishop put in with a sneer, "you conform, do you?"

"I attend mass—to please my uncle," I replied boldly.

"He was ill brought up as a child," Sir Anthony said hastily, speaking in a tone which those below could not hear. "But you know all that, my lord—you know all that. It is an old story to you. So I make, and I pray you to make for the sake of the house, some allowance. He conforms; he undoubtedly conforms."

"Enough of that then!" Gardiner assented. "The rest is for the good priest here, whose ministrations will no doubt in time avail. But a word with this young gentleman, Sir Anthony, on another subject. He left us with scant ceremony. Since it was not to the holy office he objected, perhaps it was to the Queen's Chancellor, or to the Queen?" He raised his voice with the last words and bent his brows, so that I could scarcely believe it was the same man speaking. "Eh, sir, was that so?" he continued severely, putting aside Sir Anthony's remonstrance, and glowering at me. "It may be that we have a rebel here instead of a heretic."

"God forbid!" cried the knight, unable to contain himself. It was clear that he repented

already of his ill-timed discipline. “I will answer for it that we have no Wyatts here, my lord.”

“That is well!” the Chancellor replied. “That is well!” he repeated, his eyes leaving me and roving round the hall with so proud a menace in their glance that all quailed, even the fool. “That is very well,” he said, drumming on the table with his fingers; “but let Master Francis speak for himself.”

“I never heard,” said I, boldly—I had had a moment for thought—“that Sir Thomas Wyatt had any following in this country. None to my knowledge. As for the Queen’s marriage with the Prince of Spain, which was the ground, as we gathered here, of Wyatt’s rising with the Kentish folk, it seems a matter rather for the Queen’s grace than her subjects. But if that be not so, I, for my part, would rather have seen her married to a stout Englishman—ay, or to a Frenchman.”

“And why, young gentleman?” he asked sharply.

“Because I would we kept at peace with France. We have more to gain by fighting Spain than fighting France,” I answered bluntly.

My uncle held up his hands. “The boy is clean mad!” he groaned. “Who ever heard of such a thing? With all France, the rightful estate

of her Majesty, waiting to be won back, he talks of fighting Spain! And his own grandmother was a Spaniard!"

"I am none the less an Englishman for that!" I said; whereon there was a slight murmur of applause in the hall below. "And for France," I continued, carried away by this, "we have been fighting it, off and on, as long as men remember; and what are we the better? We have only lost what we had to begin. Besides, I am told that France is five times stronger than it was in Henry the Fifth's time, and we should only spend our strength in winning what we could not hold. While as to Spain——"

"Ay, as to Spain?" Sir Anthony grumbled, forgetting his formidable neighbour, and staring at me with eyes of wonder. "Why, my father fought the French at Guinegate, and my grandfather at Cherbourg, and his father at Agincourt! But there! As to Spain, you popinjay?"

"Why, she is conquering here," I answered hotly, "and colonising there among the newly-discovered countries of the world, and getting all the trade and all the seaports, and all the gold and silver; and Spain, after all, is a nation with no greater strength of men than England. Ay, and I hear," I cried, growing more excited and

raising my voice, “that now is our time or never! The Spaniards and the Portuguese have discovered a new world over seas.

“ ‘A Castilla y á Leon
Nuevo mundo dió Colon!’

say they; but depend upon it every country that is to be rich and strong in the time that is coming must have part in it. We cannot conquer either Spain or France; we have not men enough. But we have docks and sailors, and ships in London and Fowey, and Bristol and the Cinque Ports, enough to fight Spain over the great seas, and I say, ‘Have at her’!”

“What next?” groaned Sir Anthony, piteously. “Did man ever hear such crackbrained nonsense?”

But I know now, and I thought then that it was not nonsense. And others thought so too, for his words were almost lost in the cry which rang through the hall as I ceased speaking—a cry of English voices. One moment my heart beat high and proudly with a new sense of power; the next, as the shadow of a cloud falls on a sunny hillside, the cold sneer on the statesman’s face fell on me and chilled me. His set look had neither thawed nor altered; his colour had neither come nor gone. “You speak your lesson

well, lad," he said grimly. "Who taught you statecraft?"

I grew smaller, shrinking with each word he uttered; and faltered, and was dumb.

"Come," he said, "you see but a little way; yet country lads do not talk of Fowey and Bristol. Who primed you?"

"I met a Master Sebastian Cabot," I said reluctantly, when he had pressed me more than once, "who stayed a while at a house not far from here, and had been Inspector of the Navy to King Edward. He had been a seaman seventy years, and he talked——"

"Too fast!" said Gardiner, with a curt nod. "But enough, I understand. I know the man. He is dead."

He was silent then, and seemed to have fallen suddenly into thought, as a man well might who had the governing of a kingdom on his shoulders.

Seemingly he had done with me. I looked at Sir Anthony. "Ay, go!" he said irritably, waving me off. "Go!"

And I went. The ordeal was over, and over so successfully that I felt the humiliation of the afternoon cheap at the price of this triumph; for, as I stepped down, there was a buzz around me, a murmur of congratulation and pride and excite-

ment. On every Coton face I marked a flush, in every Coton eye I read a sparkle, and every flush and every sparkle was for me. Even the Chancellor's secretaries, grave, down-looking men, all secrecy and caution, cast curious glances at me, as though I were something out of the common; and the Chancellor's pages made way for me with new-born deference. “There is for country wits!” I heard Baldwin Moor cry gleefully, while the man who put food before me murmured in my ear of “the Cludde bull-pup!” If I read in Father Carey's face, as indeed I did, solicitude as well as relief and gladness, I marked the latter only, and hugged a natural pride to my breast. When Martin Luther said boldly that it was not only Bishop could fill a bowl, it was by an effort I refrained from joining in the laugh which followed.

For an hour I enjoyed this triumph, and did all but brag of it. Especially I wished Petronilla had witnessed it. At the end of that time—*Finis* as the books say. I was crossing the courtyard, one-half of which was bathed in a cold splendour of moonlight, and was feeling the first sobering touch of the night air on my brow, when I heard some one call out my name. I turned, to find one of the Chancellor's servants, a sleek,

substantial fellow, with a smug mouth, at my elbow.

"What is it?" I said.

"I am bidden to fetch you at once, Master Cludde," he answered, a gleam of sly malice peeping through the gravity of his demeanour. "The Chancellor would see you in his room, young sir."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE BISHOP'S ROOM.

THE Chancellor was lodged in the great chamber on the southern side of the courtyard, a room which we called the Tapestryed Chamber, and in which tradition said that King Henry the Sixth had once slept. It was on the upper floor, and for this reason free from the damp air which in autumn and winter rose from the moat and hung about the lower range of rooms. It was, besides, of easy access from the hall, a door in the gallery of the latter leading into an anteroom, which again opened into the Tapestryed Chamber; while a winding staircase, starting from a dark nook in the main passage of the house, also led to this state apartment, but by another and more private door.

I reached the antechamber with a stout heart in my breast, though a little sobered by my summons, and feeling such a reaction from the heat of a few minutes before as follows a plunge into

cold water. In the anteroom I was bidden to wait while the great man's will was taken, which seemed strange to me, then unused to the mumery of Court folk. But before I had time to feel much surprise, the inner door was opened, and I was told to enter.

The great room, which I had seldom seen in use, had now an appearance quite new to me. A dull red fire was glowing comfortably on the hearth-stone, before which a posset stool was standing. Near this, seated at a table strewn with a profusion of papers and documents, was a secretary writing busily. The great oaken bedstead, with its nodding tester, lay in a background of shadows, which played about the figures broidered on the hangings, or were lost in the darkness of the corners; while nearer the fire, in the light cast by the sconces fixed above the hearth, lay part of the Chancellor's equipment. The fur rugs and cloak of sable, the saddle-bags, the despatch-boxes, and the silver chafing-dish, gave an air of comfort to this part of the room. Walking up and down in the midst of these, dictating a sentence at every other turn, was Stephen Gardiner.

As I entered, the clerk looked up, holding his pen suspended. His master, by a quick nod,

ordered him to proceed. Then, signalling to me in a like silent fashion his command that I should stand by the hearth, the Bishop resumed his task of composition.

For some minutes my interest in the man, whom I had now an opportunity of scrutinising unmarked and at my leisure, took up all my attention. He was at this time close on seventy, but looked, being tall and stout, full ten years younger. His face, square and sallow, was indeed wrinkled and lined; his eyes lay deep in his head, his shoulders were beginning to bend, the nape of his neck to become prominent. He had lost an inch of his full height. But his eyes still shone brightly, nor did any trace of weakness mar the stern character of his mouth, or the crafty wisdom of his brow. The face was the face of a man austere, determined, perhaps cruel: of a man who could both think and act.

My curiosity somewhat satisfied, I had leisure, first to wonder why I had been sent for, and then to admire the prodigious number of books and papers which lay about—more, indeed, than I had ever seen together in my life. From this I passed to listening, idly at first, and with interest afterwards, to the letter which the Chancellor was dictating. It seemed from its tenor to be a letter

to some person in authority, and presently one passage attracted my attention, so that I could afterwards recall it word for word.

“I do not think”—the Chancellor pronounced, speaking in a sonorous voice, and the measured tone of one whose thoughts lie perfectly arranged in his head—“that the Duchess Katherine will venture to take the step suggested as possible. Yet Clarence’s report may be of moment. Let the house therefore be watched if anything savouring of flight be marked, and take notice whether there be a vessel in the Pool adapted to her purpose. A vessel trading to Dunquerque would be most likely. Leave her husband till I return, when I will deal with him roundly.”

I missed what followed. It was upon another subject, and my thoughts lagged behind, being wholly taken up with the Duchess Katherine and her fortunes. I wondered who she was, young or old, and what this step could be she was said to meditate, and what the jargon about the Pool and Dunquerque meant. I was still thinking of this when I was aroused by an abrupt silence, and, looking up, found that the Chancellor was bending over the papers on the table. The secretary was leaving the room.

As the door closed behind him, Gardiner rose

from his stooping posture and came slowly towards me, a roll of papers in his hand. "Now," he said tranquilly, seating himself in an elbow-chair which stood in front of the hearth, "I will dispose of your business, Master Cludde."

He paused, looking at me in a shrewd, masterful way, much as if—I thought at the time, little knowing how near the truth my fancy went—I were a beast he was about to buy; and then he went on. "I have sent for you, Master Francis," he said drily, fixing his piercing eyes on mine, "because I think that this country does not suit your health. You conform, but you conform with a bad grace, and England is no longer the place for such. You incite the commonalty against the Queen's allies, and England is not the place for such. Do not contradict me; I have heard you myself. Then," he continued, grimly thrusting out his jaw in a sour smile, "you misname those whom the Queen honours; and were Dr. Stephens—you take me, Master Malapert?—such a man as his predecessors, you would rue the word. For a trifle scarce weightier Wolsey threw a man to rot six years in a dungeon, boy!"

I changed colour, yet not so much in fear—though it were vain to say I did not tremble—as in confusion. I had called him Dr. Stephens,

indeed, but it had been to Petronilla only. I stood, not knowing what to say, until he, after lingering on his last words to enjoy my misery, resumed his subject. "That is one good and sufficient reason—mind you, sufficient, boy—why England is no place for you. For another, the Cluddes have always been soldiers; and you—though readier-witted than some, which comes of your Spanish grandmother—are quicker with a word than a thought, and a blow than either. Of which afterwards. Well, England is going to be no place for soldiers. Please God, we have finished with wars at home. A woman's reign should be a reign of peace."

I hardened my heart at that. A reign of peace, forsooth, when the week before we had heard of a bishop burned at Gloucester! I hardened my heart. I would not be frightened, though I knew his power, and knew how men in those days misused power. I would put a bold face on the matter.

He had not done with me yet, however. "One more reason I have," he continued, stopping me as I was about to speak, "for saying that England will not suit your health, Master Cludde. It is that I do not want you here. Abroad, you may be of service to me, and at the same time carve

out your own fortune. You have courage, and can use a sword, I hear. You understand—and it is a rare gift with Englishmen—some Spanish, which I suppose your father or your uncle taught you. You can—so Father Carey says—construe a Latin sentence if it be not too difficult. You are scarcely twenty, and you will have me for your patron. Why, were I you, boy, with your age and your chances, I would die Prince or Pope! Ay, I would, by Heaven!”

He stopped speaking, his eyes on fire, and a ring of such real feeling flashing out in his last words that, though I distrusted him, though old prejudices warned me against him, and, at heart a Protestant, I shuddered at things I had heard of him, the longing to see the world and have adventures seized upon me. Yet I did not speak at once. He had told me that my tongue outran my thoughts, and I stood silent until he asked me curtly, “Well, sirrah, what do you say?”

“I say, my Lord Bishop,” I replied respectfully, “that the prospect you hold out to me would tempt me were I a younger son, or without those ties of gratitude which hold me to my uncle. But, my father excepted, I am Sir Anthony’s only heir.”

“Ah, your father!” he said contemptuously.

"You do well to remind me of him, for I see you are forgetting the first part of my speech in thinking of the last! Should I have promised first and threatened later? You would fain, I expect, stay here and woo Mistress Petronilla? Do I touch you there? You think to marry the maid and be master of Coton End in God's good time, do you? Then listen, Francis Cludde," he went on, leaning forward, and looking at me yet more closely. "Neither one nor the other, neither maid nor meadow, will be yours, should you stay here till Domesday!"

I started, and stood glowering on him, speechless with anger and astonishment.

"You do not know who you are!" he continued, leaning forward again with a sudden movement, and speaking with one claw-like finger extended, and a malevolent gleam in his eyes. "You called me a nameless child a while ago, and so I was; yet have I risen to be ruler of England, Master Cludde! But you—I will tell you which of us is base-born. I will tell you who and what your father, Ferdinand Cludde, was. He was, nay, he is—he is now—my tool, spy, jackal! Do you understand, boy? Your father is one of the band of foul creatures to whom such as I, base-born though I am, fling the scraps from their table!

He is the vilest of the vile men who do my dirty work, my lad."

He had raised his voice and hand in passion, real or assumed. He dropped them as I sprang forward. "You lie!" I cried, trembling all over.

"Easy! easy!" he said. He stopped me where I was by a gesture of stern command. "It is soon settled. Think!" he continued, calmly and weightily. "Has any one ever spoken to you of your father since the day, seven years ago, when you came here, a child, brought by a servant? Has Sir Anthony talked of him? Has any servant named his name to you? Think, boy. If Ferdinand Cludde be a father to be proud of, why does his brother make nought of him?"

"He is a Protestant," I said faintly. Faintly, because I had asked myself this very question not once, but often. Sir Anthony so seldom mentioned my father that I had thought it strange myself. I had thought it strange, too, that the servants, who must well remember Ferdinand Cludde, never talked to me about him. Hitherto I had always been satisfied to answer, "He is a Protestant;" but face to face with this terrible old man and his pitiless charge, the words came but faintly from my lips.

"A Protestant," he replied solemnly. "Yes,

this comes of schism, that villains cloak themselves in it and parade for true men. A Protestant, you call him, boy? He has been that, ay, and all things to all men; and he has betrayed all things and all men. He was in the great Cardinal's confidence, and forsook him, when he fell, for Cromwell. Thomas Cromwell, although they were of the same persuasion, he betrayed to me. I have here, here!"—and he struck the letters in his hand a scornful blow—"the offer he made to me, and his terms. Then, eight years back, when the late King Edward came to the throne, I too fell on evil days, and Master Cludde abandoned me for my Lord Hertford, but did me no great harm. But he did something which blasted him—blasted him at last.

He paused. Had the fire died down, or was it only in my imagination that the shadows thickened round the bed behind him, and closed in more nearly on us, leaving his pale grim face to confront me—his face, which seemed the paler and grimmer, the more saturnine and all-mastering, for the dark frame which set it off?

"He did this," he continued slowly, "which came to light and blasted him. He asked, as the price of his service in betraying me, his brother's estate."

"Impossible!" I stammered. "Why, Sir Anthony——"

"What of Sir Anthony, you would ask?" the Chancellor replied, interrupting me with savage irony. "Oh, he was a Papist! an obstinate Papist! He might go hang—or to Warwick Gaol!"

"Nay, but this, at least, my lord, is false!" I cried, my knees trembling under me. "Palpably false! If my father had so betrayed his own flesh and blood, should I be here? Should I be at Coton End? You say this happened eight years ago. Seven years ago I came here. Would Sir Anthony——"

"There are fools everywhere," the old man sneered. "When my Lord Hertford refused your father's suit, Ferdinand Cludde began—it is his nature—to plot against him. He was found out, and execrated by all—for he had been false to all—he fled for his life. He left you behind, and a servant brought you to Coton End, where Sir Anthony took you in."

I covered my face. Alas! I believed him, I, who had always been so proud of my lineage, so proud of the brave traditions of the house and its honour, so proud of Coton End and all that belonged to it! Now, if this were true, I could never again take pleasure in one or the other. I

was the son of a man branded as a turncoat and an informer, of one who was the worst of traitors! I sank down on the settle behind me and hid my face. Another might have thought less of the blow, or, with greater knowledge of the world, might have made light of it as a thing not touching himself. But on me, young as I was, and proud, and as yet tender, and having done nothing myself, it fell with crushing force.

It was years since I had seen my father, and I could not stand forth loyally and fight his battle as a son his father's friend and familiar for years might have fought it. On the contrary, there was so much which seemed mysterious in my past life, so much that bore out the Chancellor's accusation, that I felt a dread of its truth even before I had proof. Yet I would have proof. "Show me the letters!" I said, harshly; "show me the letters, my lord!"

"You know your father's handwriting?"

"I do."

I knew it, not from any correspondence my father had held with me, but because I had more than once examined with natural curiosity the wrappers of the despatches which, at intervals of many months, sometimes of a year, came from him to Sir Anthony. I had never known anything

of the contents of the letters, all that fell to my share being certain formal messages, which Sir Anthony would give me, generally with a clouded brow and a testy manner that grew genial again only with the lapse of time.

Gardiner handed me the letters, and I took them and read one. One was enough. That my father! Alas! alas! No wonder that I turned my face to the wall, shivering as with the ague, and that all about me—except the red glow of the fire, which burned into my brain—seemed darkness! I had lost the thing I valued most. I had lost at a blow everything of which I was proud. The treachery that could flush that worn face opposite to me, lined as it was with statecraft, and betray the wily tongue into passion, seemed to me, young and impulsive, a thing so vile as to brand a man's children through generations.

Therefore I hid my face in the corner of the settle, while the Chancellor gazed at me a while in silence, as one who had made an experiment might watch the result.

"You see now, my friend," he said at last, almost gently, "that you may be base-born in more ways than one. But be of good cheer; you are young, and what I have done you may do. Think of Thomas Cromwell—his father was nought.

Think of the old Cardinal—my master. Think of the Duke of Suffolk—Charles Brandon, I mean. He was a plain gentleman, yet he married a queen. More, the door which they had to open for themselves I will open for you—only, when you are inside, play the man, and be faithful.”

“What would you have me do?” I whispered hoarsely.

“I would have you do this,” he answered, speaking slowly and clearly. “There are great things brewing in the Netherlands—great changes, unless I am mistaken. I have need of an agent there, a man stout, trusty, and, in particular, unknown, who will keep me informed of events. If you will be that agent, I can procure for you—and not appear in the matter myself—a post of pay and honour in the Regent’s Guards. What say you to that, Master Cludde? A few weeks, and you will be making history, and Coton End will seem a mean place to you. Now what do you say?”

I was longing to be away and alone with my misery, but I forced myself to reply patiently.

“With your leave I will give you my answer to-morrow, my lord,” I said, as steadily as I could; and I rose, still keeping my face turned from him.

“Very well,” he replied, with apparent confidence. But he watched me keenly, as I fancied. “I know already what your answer will be. Yet before you go I will give you a piece of advice which in the new life you begin to-night will avail you more than silver, more than gold—ay, more than steel, Master Francis. It is this: Be prompt to think, be prompt to strike, be slow to speak! Mark it well! It is a simple recipe, yet it has made me what I am, and may make you greater. Now go!”

He pointed to the little door opening on the staircase, and I bowed and went out, closing it carefully behind me. On the stairs, moving blindly in the dark, I fell over some one who lay sleeping there, and who clutched at my leg. I shook him off, however, with an exclamation of rage, and, stumbling down the rest of the steps, gained the open air. Excited and feverish, I shrank with aversion from the confinement of my room, and, hurrying over the drawbridge, sought at random the long terrace by the fish-pools, on which the moonlight fell, a sheet of silver, broken only by the sun-dial and the shadows of the rose-bushes. The night air sweeping chill from the forest fanned my cheeks as I paced up and down. One way I had before me the manor house—the

steep gable-ends, the gateway tower, the low out-buildings and cornstacks and stables—and flanking these the squat tower and nave of the church. I turned. Now I saw only the water and the dark line of trees which fringed the further bank. But above these the stars were shining.

Yet in my mind there was no starlight. There, all was a blur of wild passions and resolves. Shame and an angry resentment against those who had kept me so long in ignorance—even against Sir Anthony—were my uppermost feelings. I smarted under the thought that I had been living on his charity. I remembered many a time when I had taken much on myself, and he had smiled; and the remembrance stung me. I longed to assert myself and do something to wipe off the stain.

But should I accept the Bishop's offer? It never crossed my mind to do so. He had humiliated me, and I hated him for it. Longing to cut myself off from my old life, I could not support a patron who would know, and might cast in my teeth, the old shame. A third reason, too, worked powerfully with me as I became cooler. This was the conviction that, apart from the glitter which the old man's craft had cast about it, the part he would have me play was that of a spy—

an informer! A creature like—I dared not say like my father, yet I had him in my mind. And from this, from the barest suspicion of this, I shrank as the burned puppy from the fire—shrank with fierce twitching of nerve and sinew.

Yet if I would not accept his offer, it was clear I must fend for myself. His threats meant as much as that, and I smiled sternly as I found necessity at one with inclination. I would leave Coton End at once, and henceforth I would fight for my own hand. I would have no name until I had made for myself a new one.

With this resolve fully formed, I turned and went back to the house, and felt my way to my own chamber. The moonlight poured through the lattice and fell white on my pallet. I crossed the room and stood still. Down the middle of the coverlet—or my eyes deceived me—lay a dark line.

I stooped mechanically to see what this was, and found my own sword lying there; the sword which Sir Anthony had given me on my last birthday. But how had it come there? As I took it up something soft and light brushed my hand and dropped from the hilt. Then I remembered. A week before I had begged Petronilla to make me a sword-knot of blue velvet for use

on state occasions. No doubt she had done it, and had brought the sword back this evening and laid it there in token of peace.

I sat down on my bed, and softer and kinder thoughts came to me: thoughts of love and gratitude, in which the old man who had been a second father to me had part. I would go as I had resolved, but I would return to them when I had done a thing worth doing, something which should efface the brand that lay on me now.

With gentle fingers I disengaged the velvet knot and thrust it into my bosom. Then I tied about the hilt the old leather thong, and began to make my preparations; considering this or that route while I hunted for my dagger, and changed my doublet and hose for stouter raiment and long untanned boots. I was yet in the midst of this, when a knock at the door startled me.

"Who is there?" I asked, standing erect.

For answer Martin Luther slid in, closing the door behind him. The fool did not speak, but turning his eyes first on one thing and then on another, nodded sagely.

"Well?" I growled.

"You are off, master," he said, nodding again. "I thought so."

"Why did you think so?" I retorted impatiently.

"It is time for the young birds to fly when the cuckoo begins to stir," he answered.

I understood him dimly and in part. "You have been listening," I said wrathfully, my cheeks burning.

"And been kicked in the face like a fool for my pains," he answered. "Ah, well, it is better to be kicked by the boot you love than kissed by the lips you hate. But, Master Francis, Master Francis!" he continued in a whisper.

He said no more, and I looked up. The man was stooping slightly forward, his pale face thrust out. There was a strange gleam in his eyes, and his teeth grinned in the moonlight. Thrice he drew his finger across his lean knotted throat. "Shall I?" he hissed, his hot breath reaching me—"shall I? He is old. 'Twill be but a blow."

I recoiled from him shuddering. It was a ghastly pantomime, and it seemed to me that I saw madness in his eyes. "In Heaven's name, no!" I cried—"No! Do you hear, Martin? No!"

He stood back on the instant, as a dog might have done being reprov'd. But I could hardly finish in comfort after that, with him standing

there, although when I next turned to him he seemed half asleep and his eyes were dull and fishy as ever.

"One thing you can do," I said brusquely. Then I hesitated, looking round me. I wished to send something to Petronilla, some word, some keepsake. But I had nothing which would serve a maid's purpose, and could think of nothing until my eye lit on a house-martin's nest, lying where I had cast it on the window-sill. I had taken it down that morning because the droppings during the last summer had fallen on the lead work, and I would not have it used when the swallows returned. It was but a bit of clay, and yet it would serve. She would guess its meaning.

I gave it into his hands, "Take this," I said, "and give it privately to Mistress Petronilla. Privately, you understand. And say nothing to any one, or the Bishop will flay your back, Martin."

CHAPTER III.

“DOWN WITH PURVEYORS!”

THE first streak of daylight found me already footing it through the forest by paths known to few save the woodcutters, but with which many a boyish exploration had made me familiar. From Coton End the London road lies plain and fair through Stratford-on-Avon and Oxford. But my plan, the better to evade pursuit, was, instead, to cross the forest in a north-easterly direction, and, passing by Warwick, to strike the great north road between Coventry and Daventry; which, running thence south-eastward, would take me as straight as a bird might fly through Dunstable, St. Albans, and Barnet, to London. My baggage consisted only of my cloak, sword, and dagger; and for money I had but a gold angel, and a few silver bits of doubtful value. But I trusted that this store, slender as it was, would meet my charges as far as London. Once there I must depend on my wits, either for providence at home, or a passage abroad.

Striding steadily up and down hill, for Arden Forest is made up of hills and dells, which follow one another as do the wave and trough of the sea, only less regularly, I made my way towards Wootton Wawen. As soon as I espied its battlemented church lying in a wooded bottom below me I kept a more easterly course, and, leaving Henley-in-Arden far to the left, passed on towards Leek Wootton. The damp dead bracken under foot, the leafless oaks and grey sky overhead, nay, the very cry of the bittern fishing in the bottoms, seemed to be at one with my thoughts, for these were dreary and sad enough.

But hope and a fixed aim form no bad make-shifts for happiness. Striking the broad London road as I had purposed, I slept that night at Ryton Dunsmoor, and the next at Towcester; and the third day, which rose bright and frosty, found me stepping gaily southwards, travel-stained indeed, but dry and whole. My spirits rose with the temperature. For a time I put the past behind me, and found amusement in the sights of the road: in the heavy wagons and long trains of pack-horses, and the cheery greetings which met me with each mile. After all, I had youth and strength, and the world before me, and particularly Stony Stratford, where I meant to dine.

There was one trouble common among wayfarers which did not touch me, and that was the fear of robbers, for he would be a sturdy beggar who would rob an armed foot-passenger for the sake of an angel; and the groats were gone. So I felt no terrors on that account, and even when, about noon, I heard a horseman trot up behind me, and rein in his horse so as to keep pace with me at a walk, step for step—a thing which might have seemed suspicious to some—I took no heed of him. I was engaged with my first view of Stratford, and did not turn my head. We had walked on in this way for fifty paces or more, before it struck me as odd that the man did not pass me.

Then I turned, and shading my eyes from the sun which stood just over his shoulder, said, “Good-day, friend.”

“Good-day, master,” he answered.

He was a stout, smug fellow, looking like a citizen, although he had a sword by his side, and wore it with an air of importance which the sunshine of opportunity might have ripened into a swagger. His dress was plain; and he sat a good hackney as a miller’s sack might have sat it. His face was the last thing I looked at. When I raised my eyes to it I got an unpleasant

start. The man was no stranger. I knew him in a moment for the messenger who had summoned me to the Chancellor's presence.

The remembrance did not please me; and reading in the fellow's sly look that he recognised me, and thought he had made a happy discovery in finding me, I halted abruptly. He did the same.

"It is a fine morning," he said, taken aback by my sudden movement, but affecting an indifference which the sparkle in his eye belied. "A rare day for the time of year."

"It is," I answered, gazing steadily at him.

"Going to London? Or may be only to Stratford?" he hazarded. He fidgeted uncomfortably under my eye, but still pretended ignorance of me.

"That is as may be," I answered.

"No offence, I am sure," he said.

I cast a quick glance up and down the road. There happened to be no one in sight. "Look here!" I replied, stepping forward to lay my hand on the horse's shoulder—but the man reined back and prevented me, thereby giving me a clue to his character—"you are in the service of the Bishop of Winchester?"

His face fell, and he could not conceal his

disappointment at being recognised. "Well, master," he answered reluctantly, "perhaps I am, and perhaps I am not."

"That is enough," I said, shortly. "And you know me. You need not lie about it, man, for I can see you do. Now look here, Master Steward, or whatever your name may be——"

"It is Master Pritchard," he put in, sulkily; "and I am not ashamed of it."

"Very well. Then let us understand one another. Do you mean to interfere with me?"

He grinned. "Well, to be plain, I do," he replied, reining his horse back another step. "I have orders to look out for you, and have you stopped if I find you. And I must do my duty, sir; I am sworn to it, Master Cludde."

"Right!" said I, calmly; "and I must do mine, which is to take care of my skin." And I drew my sword and advanced upon him with a flourish. "We will soon decide this little matter," I added, grimly, one eye on him and one on the empty road, "if you will be good enough to defend yourself."

But there was no fight in the fellow. By good luck, too, he was so startled that he did not do what he might have done with safety; namely, retreat, and keep me in sight until some

passers-by came up. He did give back, indeed, but it was against the bank. "Have a care!" he cried in a fume, his eye following my sword nervously: he did not try to draw his own. "There is no call for fighting, I say."

"But I say there is," I replied, bluntly. "Call and cause! Either you fight me, or I go where I please."

"You may go to Bath for me!" he spluttered, his face the colour of a turkey-cock's wattles with rage and disappointment.

"Do you mean it, my friend?" I said, and I played my point about his leg, half-minded to give him a little prod by way of earnest. "Make up your mind."

"Yes!" he shrieked out, suspecting my purpose, and bouncing about in his saddle like a parched pea. "Yes, I say!" he roared. "Do you hear me? You go your way, and I will go mine."

"That is a bargain," I said, quietly; "and mind you keep to it."

I put up my sword with my face turned from him, lest he should see the curl of my lip and the light in my eyes. In truth, I was uncommonly well pleased with myself, and was think-

ing that if I came through all my adventures as well, I should do merrily. Outwardly, however, I tried to ignore my victory, and to make things as easy as I could for my friend—if one may call a man who will not fight him a friend, a thing I doubt. "Which way are you going?" I asked amicably; "to Stratford?"

He nodded, for he was too sulky to speak.

"All right!" I said, cheerfully, feeling that my dignity could take care of itself now. "Then so far we may go together. Only do you remember the terms. After dinner each goes his own way."

He nodded again, and we turned, and went on in silence, eying one another askance, like two ill-matched dogs coupled together. But, luckily, our forced companionship did not last long, a quarter of a mile and a bend in the road bringing us to the first low grey houses of Stratford—a long, straggling village it seemed, made up of inns strewn along the road, like beads threaded on a rosary. And to be sure, to complete the likeness, we came presently upon an ancient stone cross standing on the green. I pulled up in front of this with a sigh of pleasure, for on either side of it, one facing the other, was an inn of the better class.

“Well,” I said, “which shall it be? The Rose and Crown, or the Crown without the Rose?”

“Choose for yourself,” he answered, churlishly. “I go to the other.”

I shrugged my shoulders. After all, you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, and if a man has not courage he is not likely to have good fellowship. But the words angered me, nevertheless, for a shabby, hulking fellow lounging up to me at the moment overheard them and grinned—a hiccoughing, blear-eyed man he was as I had ever met, with a red nose and the rags of a tattered cassock about him. I turned away in annoyance, and chose the “Crown” at hazard; and pushing my way through a knot of horses that stood tethered at the door, went in, leaving the two to their devices.

I found a roaring fire in the great room, and three or four yeomen standing about it, drinking ale. I was hot from walking, so, after saluting them and ordering my meal, I went and sat for choice on a bench by the window away from the fire. The window was one of a kind common in Warwickshire houses; long and low and beetle-browed, the storey above projecting over it. I

sat here a minute looking idly out at the inn opposite—a heavy stone building with a walled courtyard attached to it—such an inn as was common enough about the time of the Wars of the Roses, when wayfarers looked rather for safety than comfort. Presently I saw a boy come out of it and start up the road at a run. Then, a minute later, the ragged fellow I had seen on the green came out and lurched across the road. He seemed to be making, though uncertainly, for my inn, and, sure enough, just as my bread and bacon—the latter hot and hissing—were put before me, he staggered into the room, bringing a strong smell of ale and onions with him. "*Pax vobiscum!*" he said, leering at me with tipsy solemnity.

I guessed then that he was a monk, one of those unfortunates, still to be found here and there up and down the country, whom King Henry, when he put down the monasteries, had made homeless. I did not look on the class with much favour, thinking that for most of them the cloister, even if the Queen should succeed in setting the abbey on their legs again, would have now few attractions. But I saw that the simple farmers received his scrap of Latin with respect, and I nodded civilly as I went on with my meal.

I was not to get off so easily, however. He came and planted himself opposite to me.

“*Pax vobiscum*, my son,” he repeated. “The ale is cheap here, and good.”

“So is the ham, good father,” I replied cheerfully, not pausing in my attack on the victuals. “I will answer for so much.”

“Well, well,” the knave replied with ready wit, “I breakfasted early. I am content. Landlord, another plate and a full tankard. The young gentleman would have me dine with him.”

I could not tell whether to be angry or to laugh at his impudence.

“The gentleman says he will answer for it!” repeated the rascal, with a twinkle in his eye, as the landlord hesitated. He was by no means so drunk as he looked.

“No, no, father,” I cried, joining in the general laugh into which the farmers by the fire broke. “A cup of ale is in reason, and for that I will pay, but for no more. Drink it, and wish me God-speed.”

“I will do more than that, lad,” he answered. Swaying to and fro, my cup, which he had seized, in his grasp, he laid his hand on the window-ledge beside me, as though to steady himself, and

stooped until his coarse puffy face was but a few inches from mine. "More than that," he whispered hoarsely; and his eyes peering into mine were now sober and full of meaning. "If you do not want to be put in the stocks or worse, make tracks! Make tracks, lad!" he continued in a whisper. "Your friend over there—he is a niggardly oaf—has sent for the hundredman and the constable, and you are the quarry. So the word is, Go! That," he added aloud, standing erect again, with a drunken smile, "is for your cup of ale, and good coin too!"

For half a minute I sat quite still, taken aback, and wondering, while the bacon cooled on the plate before me, what I was to do. I did not doubt the monk was telling the truth. Why should he lie to me? And I cursed my folly in trusting to a coward's honour, or a serving-man's good faith. But lamentations were useless. What was I to do? I had no horse, and no means of getting one. I was in a strange country, and to try to escape on foot from pursuers who knew the roads, and had the law on their side, would be a hopeless undertaking. Yet to be haled back to Coton End a prisoner—I could not face that. Mechanically I raised a morsel of bacon to my lips, and as I did so, a thought occurred to me—

an idea suggested by some talk I had heard the evening before at Towcester.

Fanciful as the plan was, I snatched at it; and knowing each instant to be precious, took my courage in my hand—and my tankard. “Here,” I cried, speaking suddenly and loudly, “here is bad luck to purveyors, Master Host!”

There were a couple of stablemen within hearing, lounging in the doorway, besides the landlord and his wife and the farmers. A villager or two also had dropped in, and there were two pedlars lying half asleep in the corner. All these pricked up their ears more or less at my words. But, like most country folk, they were slow to take in anything new or unexpected; and I had to drink afresh and say again, “Here is bad luck to purveyors!” before any one took it up.

Then the landlord showed he understood.

“Ay, so say I!” he cried, with an oath. “I am with you there. Purveyors, indeed! It is such as they give the Queen a bad name!

“God bless her!” quoth the monk, loyally.

“And drown the purveyors!” a farmer exclaimed.

“They were here a year ago, and left us as bare as a shorn sheep,” struck in a strapping villager, speaking at a white heat, but telling me

no news; for this was what I had heard at Towcester the night before. “The Queen should lie warm if she uses all the wool they took! And the pack-horses they purveyed to carry off the plunder—why, the packmen avoid Stratford ever since as though we had the Black Death! Oh, down with the purveyors, say I! The first that comes this way I will show the bottom of the Ouse. Ay, that I will, though I hang for it!”

“Easy, easy, Tom Miller!” the host interposed, affecting an air of assurance, even while he cast an eye of trouble at his flitches. “It will be another ten years before they harry us again. There is Potter’s Pury! They never took a tester’s worth from Potter’s Pury! No, nor from Preston Gobion! But they will go to them next, depend upon it!”

“I hope they will,” I said, with a world of gloomy insinuation in my words. “But I doubt it!”

And this time my hint was not wasted. The landlord changed colour. “What are you driving at, master?” he asked timidly, while the others looked at me in silence and waited for more.

“What if there be one across the road now?” I said, giving way to the temptation, and speaking falsely—for which I paid dearly afterwards. “A purveyor, I mean, unless I am mistaken in him, or he tells lies. He has come straight from the

Chancellor, at any rate, white wand, warrant, and all. He is taking his dinner now, but he has sent for the hundredman, so I guess he means business."

"For the hundredman?" the landlord repeated, his brows meeting.

"Yes, unless I am mistaken."

There was silence for a moment. Then the man they called Tom Miller dashed his cap on the floor and, folding his arms defiantly, looked round on his neighbours. "He has come, has he!" he roared, his face swollen, his eyes bloodshot. "Then I will be as good as my word! Who will help? Shall we sit down and be shorn like sheep, as we were before, so that our children lay on the bare stones, and we pulled the plough ourselves? Or shall we show that we are free Englishmen, and not slaves of Frenchmen? Shall we teach Master Purveyor not to trouble us again? Now, what say you, neighbours?"

So fierce a growl of impatience and anger rose round me as at once answered the question. A dozen red faces glared at me and at one another, and from the very motion and passion of the men as they snarled and threatened, the room seemed twice as full as it was. Their oaths and cries of encouragement, not loud, but the more

dangerous for that, the fresh burst of fury which rose as the village smith and another came in and learned the news, the menacing gestures of a score of brandished fists—these sights, though they told of the very effect at which I had aimed, scared as well as pleased me. I turned red and white, and hesitated, fearing that I had gone too far.

The thing was done, however; and, what was more, I had soon to take care of myself. At the very moment when the hubbub was at its loudest I felt a chill run down my back as I met the monk's eye, and, reading in it whimsical admiration, read in it something besides, and that was an unmistakable menace. "Clever lad!" the eye said. "I will expose you," it threatened.

I had forgotten him—or, at any rate, that my acting would be transparent enough to him holding the clue in his hand—and his look was like the shock of cold water to me. But it is wonderful how keen the wits grow on the grindstone of necessity. With scarcely a second's hesitation I drew out my only piece of gold, and unnoticed by the other men, who were busy swearing at and encouraging one another, I disclosed a morsel of it. The monk's crafty eye glistened. I laid my finger on my lips.

He held up two fingers.

I shook my head and showed an empty palm. I had no more. He nodded; and the relief that nod gave me was great. Before I had time, however, to consider the narrowness of my escape, a movement of the crowd—for the news had spread with strange swiftness, and there was now a crowd assembled which more than filled the room—proclaimed that the purveyor had come out, and was in the street.

The room was nearly emptied at a rush. Though I prudently remained behind, I could, through the open window, hear as well as see what passed. The leading spirits had naturally struggled out first, and were gathered sullen, and full of dangerous possibilities, about the porch.

I suppose the Bishop's messenger saw in them nothing but a crowd of country clowns, for he came hectoring towards the door, smiting his boot with his whip, and puffing out his red cheeks mightily. Apparently he felt brave enough now that he had dined and had at his back three stout constables sworn to keep the Queen's peace.

"Make way! Make way, there, do you hear?" he cried, in a husky, pompous voice. "Make way!" he repeated, lightly touching the nearest man with

his switch. "I am on the Queen's service, boobies, and must not be hindered."

The man swore at him, but did not budge, and the bully, brought up thus sharply, awoke to the lowering faces and threatening looks which confronted him. He changed colour a little. But the ale was still in him, and, forgetting his natural discretion, he thought to carry matters with a high hand. "Come! come!" he exclaimed angrily. "I have a warrant, and you resist me at your peril. I have to enter this house. Clear the way, Master Hundredman, and break these fellows' heads if they withstand you."

A growl as of a dozen bull-dogs answered him, and he drew back, as a child might who has trodden on an adder. "You fools!" he spluttered, glaring at them viciously. "Are you mad? Do you know what you are doing? Do you see this?" He whipped out from some pocket a short white staff, and brandished it. "I come direct from the Lord Chancellor and upon his business, do you hear, and if you resist me it is treason! Treason! you dogs!" he cried, his rage getting the better of him, "and like dogs you will hang for it. Master Hundredman, I order you to take in your constables and arrest that man!"

"What man?" quoth Tom Miller, eyeing him fixedly.

"The stranger who came in an hour ago, and is inside the house."

"Him, he means, who told about the purveyor across the road," the monk explained, with a wink.

That wink sufficed. There was a roar of execration, and in the twinkling of an eye the Jack-in-office, tripped up this way and shoved that, was struggling helplessly in the grasp of half-a-dozen men, who fought savagely for his body with the hundredman and constables.

"To the river! To the Ouse with him!" yelled the mob. "In the Queen's name!" shouted the officers. But these were to those as three to a score, and taken by surprise besides, and doubtful of the rights of the matter. Yet for an instant, as the crowd went reeling and fighting down the road, they prevailed; the constables managed to drag their leader free, and I caught a glimpse of him, wild-eyed and frantic with fear, his clothes torn from his back, standing at bay like some animal, and brandishing his staff in one hand, a packet of letters in the other.

"I have letters, letters of state!" he screamed shrilly. "Let me alone, I tell you! Let me go, you curs!"

But in vain. The next instant the mob were upon him again. The packet of letters went one way, the staff was dashed another. He was thrown down and plucked up again, and hurried, bruised and struggling, towards the river, his screams for mercy and furious threats rising shrilly above the oaths and laughter.

I felt myself growing pale as scream followed scream. "They will kill him!" I exclaimed, trembling, and preparing to follow. "I cannot see this done."

But the monk, who had returned to my side, grasped my arm. "Don't be a fool," he said sharply. "I will answer for it they will not kill him. Tom Miller is not a fool, though he is angry. He will duck him, and let him go. But I will trouble you for that bit of gold, young gentleman."

I gave it to him.

"Now," he continued with a leer, "I will give you a hint in return. If you are wise you will be out of this county in twelve hours. Tethered to the gate over there is a good horse which belongs to a certain purveyor now in the river. Take it! There is no one to say you nay. And begone!"

I looked hard at him for a minute, my heart beating fast. This was horse-stealing. And horse-

stealing was a hanging matter. But I had done so much already that I felt I might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. I was not sure that I had not incited to treason, and what was stealing a horse beside that? "I will do it!" I said desperately.

"Don't lose time, then," quoth my mentor.

I went out then and there, and found he had told the truth. Every soul in the place had gone to see the ducking, and the street was empty. Kicked aside in the roadway lay the bundle of letters, soiled but not torn, and in the gutter was the staff. I stooped and picked up one and the other—in for a lamb, in for a sheep! and they might be useful some day. Then I jumped into the saddle, and twitched the rein off the hook.

But before I could drive in the spurs, a hand fell on the bridle, and the monk's face appeared at my knee. "Well?" I said, glaring down at him—I was burning to be away.

"That is a good cloak you have got there," he muttered hurriedly. "There, strapped to the saddle, you fool. You do not want that, give it me. Do you hear? Quick, give it me," he cried, raising his voice and clutching at it fiercely, his face dark with greed and fear.

"I see," I replied bitterly, as I unstrapped it.

“I am to steal the horse that you may get the cloak. And then you will lay the lot on my shoulders. Well, take it!” I cried, “and go your way as fast as you can.”

Throwing it at him as hard as I could, I shook up the reins and went off down the road at a gallop. The wind whistled pleasantly past my ears. The sounds of the town grew faint and distant. Each bound of the good hack carried me farther and farther from present danger, farther and farther from the old life. In the exhilaration and excitement of the moment I forgot my condition; forgot that I had not a penny-piece in my pocket, and that I had left an unpaid bill behind me; forgot even that I rode a—well, a borrowed horse.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO SISTERS OF MERCY.

A YOUNGER generation has often posed me finely by asking, "What, Sir Francis! Did you not see *one* bishop burned? Did you not know *one* of the martyrs? Did you *never* come face to face with Queen Mary?" To all which questions I have one answer, No, and I watch small eyes grow large with astonishment. But the truth is, a man can only be in one place at a time. And though, in this very month of February, 1555, Prebendary Rogers—a good, kindly man, as I have heard, who had a wife and nine children—was burned in Smithfield in London for religion, and the Bishop of Gloucester suffered in his own city, and other inoffensive men were burned to death, and there was much talk of these things, and in thousands of breasts a smouldering fire was kindled which blazed high enough by-and-by—why, I was at Coton End, or on the London Road, at the time, and learned such things only dimly and by hearsay.

But the rill joins the river at last; and oftentimes suddenly and at a bound, as it were. On this very day, while I cantered easily southwards with my face set towards St. Albans, Providence was at work shaping a niche for me in the lives of certain people, who were at the time as unconscious of my existence as I was of theirs. In a great house in the Barbican in London there was much stealthy going and coming on this February afternoon and evening. Behind locked doors, and in fear and trembling, mails were being packed and bags strapped, and fingers almost too delicate for the task were busy with nails and hammers, securing this and closing that. The packers knew nothing of me, nor I of them. Yet but for me all that packing would have been of no avail; and but for them my fate might have been very different. Still, the sound of the hammer did not reach my ears, or, doing so, was covered by the steady tramp of the roadster; and no vision, so far as I ever heard, of a dusty youth riding Londonwards came between the secret workers and their task.

I had made up my mind to sleep at St. Albans that night, and for this reason, and for others relating to the Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, in which county Stony Stratford lies, I pushed on briskly.

I presently found time, however, to examine the packet of letters of which I had made spoil. On the outer wrapper I found there was no address, only an exhortation to be speedy. Off this came, therefore, without ceremony, and was left in the dirt. Inside I found two sealed epistles, each countersigned on the wrapper, "Stephen Winton."

"Ho! ho!" said I. "I did well to take them."

Over the signature on the first letter—it seemed to be written on parchment—were the words, "Haste! haste! haste!" This was the thicker and heavier of the two, and was addressed to Sir Maurice Berkeley, at St. Mary Overy's, Southwark, London. I turned it over and over in my hands, and peeped into it, hesitating. Twice I muttered, "All is fair in love and war!" And at last, with curiosity fully awake, and a glance behind me to make sure that the act was unobserved, I broke the seal. The document proved to be as short and pithy as it was startling. It was an order commanding Sir Maurice Berkeley forthwith, in the Queen's name, and by the authority of the Council, and so on, and so on, to arrest Katherine Willoughby de Eresby, Duchess of Suffolk, and to deliver her into the custody of the Lieutenant of the Tower, "These presents to be his warranty for the detention of the said

Duchess of Suffolk until her Grace's pleasure in the matter be known."

When it was too late I trembled to think what I had done. To meddle with matters of State might be more dangerous a hundred times than stealing horses, or even than ducking the Chancellor's messenger! Seeing at this moment a party of travellers approach, I crammed the letter into my pocket, and rode by them with a red face, and a tongue that stuttered so feebly that I could scarcely return their greetings. When they had gone by I pulled out the warrant again, having it in my mind to tear it up without a moment's delay—to tear it into the smallest morsels, and so get rid of a thing most dangerous. But the great red seal dangling at the foot of the parchment caught my eye, and I paused to think. It was so red, so large, so imposing, it seemed a pity to destroy it. It must surely be good for something. I folded up the warrant again, and put it away in my safest pocket. Yes, it might be good for something.

I took out the other letter. It was bound with green ribbon and sealed with extreme care, being directed simply to Mistress Clarence—there was no address. But over Gardiner's signature

on the wrapper were the words, "These, on your peril, very privately."

I turned it over and over, and said the same thing about love and war, and even repeated to myself my old proverb about a sheep and a lamb. But somehow I could not do it. The letter was a woman's letter; the secret, her secret; and though my fingers itched as they hovered about the seals, my cheek tingled too. So at last, with a muttered "What would Petronilla say?" I put it away, unopened, in the pocket where the warrant lay. The odds were immense that Mistress Clarence would never get it; but at least her secret should remain hers, and my honour mine!

It was dark when I rode, thoroughly jaded, into St. Albans. I was splashed with mud up to the waist, and wetted by a shower, and looked, I have no doubt, from the effect of my journeying on foot and horseback, as disreputable a fellow as might be. The consciousness too that I was without a penny, and the fear lest, careful as I had been to let no one outstrip me, the news of the riot at Stratford might have arrived, did not tend to give me assurance, as I walked into the inn. I poked my head timidly into the great room, hoping that I might have it to myself. To my disgust it was full of people. Half-a-dozen

travellers and as many townsfolk were sitting round the fire, talking briskly over their evening draught. Yet I had no choice. I was hungry, and the thing had to be done, and I swaggered in, something of the sneak, no doubt, peeping through my bravado. I remarked, as I took my seat by the fire and set to drying myself, that I was greeted by a momentary silence, and that two or three of the company began to eye me suspiciously.

There was one man, who sat on the settle in the warmest corner of the chimney, who seemed in particular to resent my damp neighbourhood. His companions treated him with so much reverence, and he snubbed them so regularly, that I wondered who he was; and presently, listening to the conversation which went round me, I had my curiosity satisfied. He was no less a personage than the Bailiff of St. Albans, and his manner befitted such a man, for it seemed to indicate that he thought himself heir to all the powers of the old Abbots under whose broad thumbs his father and grandfather had groaned.

My conscience pricking me, I felt some misgiving when I saw him, after staring at me and whispering to two or three of his neighbours, beckon the landlord aside. His big round face

and burly figure gave him a general likeness to bluff King Hal, and he appeared to be aware of this himself, and to be inclined to ape the stout king's ways, which, I have ever heard my uncle say, were ways heavy for others' toes. For a while, however, seeing my supper come in, I forgot him. The bare-armed girl who brought it to me, and in whom my draggled condition seemed to provoke feelings of a different nature, lugged up a round table to the fire. On this she laid my meal, not scrupling to set aside some of the smug dry townsfolk. Then she set a chair for me well in the blaze, and folding her arms in her apron stood to watch me fall to. I did so with a will, and with each mouthful of beef and draught of ale spirit and strength came back to me. The cits round me might sneer and shake their heads, and the travellers smile at my appetite. In five minutes I cared not a whit! I could give them back joke for joke, and laugh with the best of them.

Indeed, I had clean forgotten the Bailiff, when he stalked back to his place. But the moment our eyes met I guessed there was trouble afoot. The landlord came with him and stood looking at me, sending off the wench with a flea in her ear; and I felt under his eye an uncomfortable con-

sciousness that my purse was empty. Two or three late arrivals, to whom I suppose Master Bailiff had confided his suspicions, took their stand also in a half-circle, and scanned me queerly. Altogether it struck me suddenly that I was in a tight place, and had need of my wits.

"Ahem!" said the Bailiff, abruptly, taking skilful advantage of a lull in the talk. "Where from last, young man?" He spoke in a deep choky voice, and, if I was not mistaken, winked one of his small eyes in the direction of his friends, as though to say, "Now see me pose him!"

I only put another morsel in my mouth. For a moment indeed the temptation to reply "Tow-cester," seeing that such a journey over a middling road was something to brag of before the Highway Law came in, almost overcame me. But in time I bethought me of Stephen Gardiner's maxim, "Be slow to speak!" and I put another morsel in my mouth.

The Bailiff's face grew red, or rather, redder. "Come, young man, did you hear me speak?" he said pompously. "Where from last?"

"From the road, sir," I replied, turning to him as if I had not heard him before. "And a very wet road it was."

A man who sat next me chuckled, being ap-

parently a stranger like myself. But the Bailiff puffed himself into a still more striking likeness to King Henry, and including him in his scowl shouted at me, "Sirrah! don't bandy words with me! Which way did you come along the road, I asked."

It was on the tip of my tongue to answer saucily, "The right way!" But I reflected that I might be stopped; and to be stopped might mean to be hanged at worst, and something very unpleasant at best. So I controlled myself, and answered—though the man's arrogance was provoking enough—"I have come from Stratford, Master Bailiff, and I am going to London. Now you know as much as I do."

"Do I?" he said, with a sneer and a wink at the landlord.

"Yes, I think so," I answered patiently.

"Well, I don't!" he retorted, in vulgar triumph. "I don't. It is my opinion that you have come from London."

I went on with my supper.

"Do you hear?" he asked pompously, sticking his arms akimbo and looking round for sympathy. "You will have to give an account of yourself, young man. We will have no penniless rogues and sturdy vagabonds wandering about St. Albans."

"Penniless rogues do not go a-horseback," I answered. But it was wonderful how my spirits sank again under that word "penniless." It hit me hard.

"Wait a bit," he said, raising his finger to command attention for his next question. "What is your religion, young man?"

"Oh!" I replied, putting down my knife, and looking open scorn at him, "you are an inquisitor, are you?" At which words of mine there was a kind of stir. "You would burn me as I hear they burned Master Sandars at Coventry last week, would you? They were talking about it down the road."

"You will come to a bad end, young man!" he retorted viciously, his outstretched finger shaking as if the palsy had seized him. For this time my taunt had gone home, and more than one of the listeners standing on the outer edge of the group, and so beyond his ken, had muttered shame. More than one face had grown dark. "You will come to a bad end!" he repeated. "If it be not here, then somewhere else! It is my opinion that you have come from London, and that you have been in trouble. There is a hue-and-cry out for a young fellow just your age, and a cock of your hackle, I judge, who is wanted for

heresy. A Londoner too. You do not leave here until you have given an account of yourself, Master Jack-a-Dandy!" The party had all risen round me, and some of the hindmost had got on benches to see me the better. Among these, between two bacon flitches, I caught a glimpse of the serving-maid's face as she peered at me, pale and scared, and a queer impulse led me to nod to her—a reassuring little nod. I found myself growing cool and confident, seeing myself so cornered.

"Easy! easy!" I said; "let a man finish his supper and get warmed in peace."

"Bishop Bonner will warm you!" cried the Bailiff.

"I dare say—as they warm people in Spain!" I sneered.

"He will be Bishop Burner to you!" shrieked the Bailiff, almost beside himself with rage at being so bearded by a lad.

"Take care!" I retorted. "Do not you speak evil of dignitaries, or you will be getting into trouble!"

He fairly writhed under this rejoinder.

"Landlord!" he spluttered, "I shall hold you responsible! If this person leaves your house, and is not forthcoming when wanted, you will suffer for it!"

The landlord scratched his head, being a good-natured fellow; but a bailiff is a bailiff, especially at St. Albans. And I was muddy and travel-stained, and quick of my tongue for one so young, which the middle-aged never like, though the old bear it better. He hesitated.

"Do not be a fool, Master Host!" I said quietly. "I have something here"—and I touched my pocket, which happened to be near my sword-hilt—"that will make you rue it if you interfere with me!"

"Ho! ho!" cried the Bailiff, in haste and triumph. "So that is his tone! We have a tavern-brawler here, have we! A young swashbuckler! His tongue will not run so fast when he finds his feet in the stocks. Master Landlord, call the watch! Call the watch at once, I command you!"

"You will do so at your peril!" I said sternly. Then, seeing that my manner had some effect upon all save the angry official, I gave way to the temptation to drive the matter home and secure my safety by the only means that seemed possible. It is an old story that one deception leads inevitably to another. I drew out the white staff I had taken from the apparitor. "Look here!" I continued, waving it. "Do you see this, you

booby? I am travelling in the Queen's name, and on her service. By special commission, too, from the Chancellor! Is that plain speaking enough for you, or do you need to see my commission? And let me tell you, Master Bailiff," I added, fixing my eye upon him, "that my business is private, and that my Lord of Winchester will not be best pleased when he hears how I have had to declare myself. Do you think the Queen's servants go always in cloth of gold, you fool? The stocks indeed!"

I laughed out loudly and without effort, for there never was anything so absurd as the change in the Bailiff's visage. His colour fled, his cheeks grew pendulous, his lip hung loose. He stared at me, gasping like a fish out of water, and seemed unable to move toe or finger. The rest enjoyed the scene, as people will enjoy a marvellous sudden stroke of fortune. It was as good as a stage pageant to them. They could not take their eyes from the pocket in which I had replaced my wand, and continued, long after I had returned to my meal, to gaze at me in respectful silence. The crestfallen Bailiff presently slipped out, and I was left cock of the walk, and for the rest of the evening enjoyed the fruits of victory.

They proved to be more substantial than I

had expected, for, as I was on my way upstairs to bed, the landlord preceding me with a light, a man accosted me, and beckoned me aside mysteriously.

"The Bailiff is very much annoyed," he said, speaking in a muffled voice behind his hand, while his eyes peered into mine.

"Well, what is that to me?" I replied, looking sternly at him. I was tired and sleepy after my meal. "He should not have made such a fool of himself."

"Tut, tut, tut, tut! You misunderstand me, young sir," the man answered, plucking my sleeve as I turned away. "He regrets the annoyance he has caused you. A mistake, he begs me to say, a pure mistake, and he hopes you will have forgotten it by morning." Then, with a skilful hand which seemed not unused to the task, he slid two coins into my palm.

I looked at them, for a moment not perceiving his drift. Then I found that they were two gold angels, and I began to understand. "Ahem!" I said, fingering them uneasily. "Yes. Well, well, I will look over it, I will look over it! Tell him from me," I continued, gaining confidence as I proceeded with my new *rôle*, "that he shall hear

no more about it. He is zealous—perhaps over-zealous!”

“That is it!” the envoy muttered, eagerly; “that is it, my dear sir! You see perfectly how it is. He is zealous. Zealous in the Queen’s service!”

“To be sure; and so I will report him. Tell him that so I will report him. And here, my good friend, take one of these for yourself,” I added, magnificently giving him back half my fortune—young donkey that I was. “Drink to the Queen’s health; and so good-night to you.”

He went away, bowing to the very ground, and, when the landlord likewise had left me, I was very merry over this, being in no mood for weighing words. The world seemed—to be sure, the ale was humming in my head, and I was in the landlord’s best room—easy enough to conquer, provided one possessed a white staff. The fact that I had no right to mine only added—be it remembered I was young and foolish—to my enjoyment of its power. I went to bed in all comfort with it under my pillow, and slept soundly, untroubled by any dream of a mischance. But when did a lie ever help a man in the end?

When I awoke, which I seemed to do on a

sudden, it was still dark. I wondered for a moment where I was, and what was the meaning of the shouting and knocking I heard. Then, discerning the faint outline of the window, I remembered the place in which I had gone to bed, and I sat up and listened. Some one, nay, several people were drumming and kicking against the wooden doors of the inn-yard, and shouting besides, loud enough to raise the dead. In the next room to mine I caught the grumbling voices of persons disturbed, like myself, from sleep. And by-and-by a window was opened and I heard the landlord ask what was the matter.

"In the Queen's name!" came the loud, impatient answer, given in a voice that rose above the ring of bridles and the stamping of iron hoofs on the roadway, "open! and that quickly, Master Host. The watch are here, and we must search."

I waited to hear no more. I was out of bed, and huddling on my clothes, and thrusting my feet into my boots, like one possessed. My heart was beating as fast as if I had been running in a race, and my hands were shaking with the shock of the alarm. The impatient voice without was Master Pritchard's, and it rang with all the vengeful passion which I should have expected that gentleman, duped, ducked, and robbed, to be

feeling. There would be little mercy to be had at his hands. Moreover, my ears, grown as keen for the moment as the hunted hare's, distinguished the tramping of at least half a dozen horses, so that it was clear that he had come with a force at his back. Resistance would be useless. My sole chance lay in flight—if flight should still be possible.

Even in my haste I did not forsake the talisman which had served me so well, but stayed an instant to thrust it into my pocket. The Cluddes have, I fancy, a knack of keeping cool in emergencies, getting, indeed, the cooler the greater the stress.

By this time the inn was thoroughly aroused. Doors were opening and shutting on all sides of me, and questions were being shouted in different tones from room to room. In the midst of the hubbub I heard the landlord come out muttering, and go downstairs to open the door. Instantly I unlatched mine, slipped through it stealthily, sneaked a step or two down the passage, and then came plump in the dark against some one who was moving as softly as myself. The surprise was complete; and I should have cried out at the unexpected collision had not the unknown

laid a cold hand on my mouth, and gently pushed me back into my room.

Here there was now a faint glimmer of dawn, and by this I saw that my companion was the serving-maid. "Hist!" she said, speaking under her breath. "Is it you they want?"

I nodded.

"I thought so," she muttered. "Then you must get out through your window. You cannot pass them. They are a dozen or more, and armed. Quick! knot this about the bars. It is no great distance to the bottom, and the ground is soft from the rain."

She tore, as she spoke, the coverlet from the bed, and twisting it deftly into a kind of rope helped me to secure one corner of it about the window-bar. "When you are down," she whispered, "keep along the wall to the right until you come to a haystack. Turn to the left there—you will have to ford the water—and you will soon be clear of the town. Look about you then, and you will see a horse-track, which leads to Elstree, running in a line with the London Road, but a mile from it and through woods. At Elstree any path to the left will take you to Barnet, and not two miles lost."

"Heaven bless you!" I said, turning from the

gloom, the dark sky, and driving scud without, to peer gratefully at her. "Heaven bless you for a good woman!"

"And God keep you for a bonnie boy," she whispered.

I kissed her, forcing into her hands—a thing the remembrance of which is very pleasant to me to this day—my last piece of gold.

A moment more, and I stood unhurt, but almost up to my knees in mud, in an alley bounded on both sides, as far as I could see, by blind walls. Stopping only to indicate by a low whistle that I was safe, I turned and sped away as fast as I could run in the direction which she had pointed out. There was no one abroad, and in a shorter time than I had expected I found myself outside the town, travelling over a kind of moorland tract bounded in the distance by woods.

Here I picked up the horse-track easily enough, and without stopping, save for a short breathing space, hurried along it, to gain the shelter of the trees. So far, so good! I had reason to be thankful. But my case was still an indifferent one. More than once in getting out of the town I had slipped and fallen. I was wet through, and plastered with dirt owing to these

mishaps; and my clothes were in a woeful plight. For a time excitement kept me up, however, and I made good way, warmed by the thought that I had again baffled the great Bishop. It was only when the day had come, and grown on to noon, and I saw no sign of any pursuers, that thought got the upper hand. Then I began to compare, with some bitterness of feeling, my present condition—wet, dirty, and homeless—with that which I had enjoyed only a week before; and it needed all my courage to support me. Skulking, half-famished, between Barnet and Tottenham, often compelled to crouch in ditches or behind walls while travellers went by, and liable each instant to have to leave the highway and take to my heels, I had leisure to feel; and I did feel more keenly, I think, that afternoon than at any later time, the bitterness of fortune. I cursed Stephen Gardiner a dozen times, and dared not let my thoughts wander to my father. I had said that I would build my house afresh. Well, truly I was building it from the foundation.

It added very much to my misery that it rained all day a cold, half-frozen rain. The whole afternoon I spent in hiding, shivering and shaking in a hole under a hedge near Tottenham: being afraid to go into London before nightfall, lest I

should be waited for at the gate and be captured. Chilled and bedraggled as I was and weak through want of food which I dared not go out to beg, the terrors of capture got hold of my mind and presented to me one by one every horrible form of humiliation, the stocks, the pillory, the cart-tail. So that even Master Pritchard, could he have seen me and known my mind, might have pitied me; so that I loathe to this day the hours I spent in that foul hiding-place. Between a man's best and worse, there is little but a platter of food.

The way this was put an end to, I well remember. An old woman came into the field where I lay hid, to drive home a cow. I had had my eyes on this cow for at least an hour, having made up my mind to milk it for my own benefit as soon as the dusk fell. In my disappointment at seeing it driven off, and also out of a desire to learn whether the old dame might not be going to milk it in a corner of the pasture, in which case I might still get an aftertaste, I crawled so far out of my hole that, turning suddenly, she caught sight of me. I expected to see her hurry off, but she did not. She took a long look, and then came back towards me, making, however, as it seemed to me, as if she did not

see me. When she had come within a few feet of me, she looked down abruptly, and our eyes met. What she saw in mine I can only guess. In hers I read divine pity. "Oh, poor lad!" she murmured; "oh, you poor, poor lad!" and there were tears in her voice.

I was so weak—it was almost twenty-four hours since I had tasted food, and I had come twenty-four miles in the time—that at that I broke down, and cried like a child.

I learned later that the old woman took me for just the same person for whom the Bailiff at St. Albans had mistaken me, a young apprentice named Hunter, who had got into trouble about religion, and was at this time hiding up and down the country, Bishop Bonner having clapped his father into gaol until the son should come to hand. But her kind heart knew no distinction of creeds. She took me to her cottage as soon as night fell, and warmed, and dried, and fed me. She did not dare to keep me under her roof for longer than an hour or two, neither would I have stayed to endanger her. But she sent me out a new man, with a crust, moreover, in my pocket. A hundred times between Tottenham and Aldersgate I said, "God bless her!" And I say so now.

So twice in one day, and that the gloomiest

day of my life, I was succoured by a woman. I have never forgotten it. I have tried to keep it always in mind; remembering, too, a saying of my uncle's, "that there is nothing on earth so merciful as a good woman, or so pitiless as a bad one."

CHAPTER V.

MISTRESS BERTRAM.

“DING! ding! ding! Aid ye the poor! Pray for the dead! Five o’clock and a murky morning.”

The noise of the bell, and the cry which accompanied it, roused me from my first sleep in London, and that with a vengeance; the bell being rung and the words uttered within three feet of my head. Where did I sleep, then? Well, I had found a cozy resting-place behind some boards which stood propped against the wall of a baker’s oven in a street near Moorgate. The wall was warm and smelt of new bread, and another besides myself had discovered its advantages. This was the watchman, who had slumbered away most of his vigil cheek by jowl with me, but, morning approaching, had roused himself, and before he was well out of his bed, certainly before he had left his bedroom, had begun—the ungrateful wretch—to prove his watchfulness by disturbing everyone else.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes, grinding my shoulders well against the wall for warmth. I had no need to turn out yet, but I began to think, and the more I thought the harder I stared at the planks six inches before my nose. My thoughts turned upon a very knotty point; one that I had never seriously considered before. What was I going to do next? How was I going to live, or to rear the new house of which I have made mention? Hitherto I had aimed simply at reaching London. London had paraded itself before my mind—though my mind should have known better—not as a town of cold streets and dreary alleys and shops open from seven to four, with, perhaps, here and there a vacant place for an apprentice; but as a gilded city of adventure and romance, in which a young man of enterprise, whether he wanted to go abroad or to rise at home, might be sure of finding his sword weighed, priced, and bought up on the instant, and himself valued at his own standard.

But London reached, the hoarding in Moorgate reached, and five o'clock in the morning reached, and somehow these visions faded rapidly. In the cold reality left to me I felt myself astray. If I would stay at home, who was going to employ me? To whom should I apply? What patron had I?

Or if I would go abroad, how was I to set about it?—how find a vessel, seeing that I might expect to be arrested the moment I showed my face in daylight?

Here all my experience failed me. I did not know what to do, though the time had come for action, and I must do or starve. It had been all very well when I was at Coton to propose that I would go up to London, and get across the water—such had been my dim notion—to the Courtenays and Killigrews, who with other refugees, Protestants for the most part, were lying on the French coast, waiting for better times. But now that I was in London, and as good as an outlaw myself, I saw no means of going to them. I seemed farther from my goal than I had been in Warwickshire.

Thinking very blankly over this I began to munch the piece of bread which I owed to the old dame at Tottenham; and had solemnly got through half of it, when the sound of rapid footsteps—the footsteps of women I judged from the lightness of the tread—caused me to hold my hand and listen. Whoever they were—and I wondered, for it was still early, and I had heard no one pass since the watchman left me—they came to a stand in front of my shelter, and one of them spoke. Her words made me start; unmistakably the voice was a

gentlewoman's, such as I had not heard for almost a week. And at this place and hour, on the raw borderland of day and night, a gentlewoman was the last person I expected to light upon. Yet, if the speaker were not someone of station, Petronilla's lessons had been thrown away upon me.

The words were uttered in a low voice; but the planks in front of me were thin, and the speaker and her companion were actually leaning against them as though to rest. I caught every accent of what seemed to be the answer to a question. "Yes! yes! It is all right!" she said, a covert ring of impatience in her tone. "Take breath a moment. I do not see him now."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered another voice. As I had fancied, there were two persons. The latter speaker's tone smacked equally of breeding with the former's, but was rounder and fuller, and more masterful; and she appeared to be out of breath. "Then perhaps we have thrown him off the trail," she continued, after a short pause, in which she seemed to have somewhat recovered herself. "I distrusted him from the first, Anne, from the first. Yet, do you know, I never feared him as I did Master Clarence; and as it was too much to hope that we should be rid of both at once—they took good care of that!—why, the attempt had to be

made while he was at home. But I always felt he was a spy."

"Who? Master Clarence?" asked she who had spoken first.

"Ay, he certainly. But I did not mean him. I meant Philip."

"Well, I—I said at first, you remember, that it was a foolhardy enterprise, mistress!"

"Tut, tut, girl!" quoth the other—tartly—this time the impatience lay with her, and she took no pains to conceal it—"we are not beaten yet. Come, look about. Cannot you remember where we are, nor which way the river should be? If the dawn were come, we could tell."

"But with the dawn——"

"The streets would fill. True, and Master Philip giving the alarm, we should be detected before we had gone far. The more need, girl, to lose no time. I have my breath again, and the child is asleep. Let us venture one way or the other, and Heaven grant it be the right one!"

"Let me see," the younger woman answered slowly, as if in doubt. "Did we come by the church? No; we came the other way. Let us try this turning then."

"Why, child, we came that way," was the decided answer. "What are you thinking of? That

would take us straight back into his arms, the wretch! Come, come!—you loiter,” continued this, the more masculine speaker, “and a minute may make all the difference between a prison and freedom. If we can reach the Lion Wharf by seven—it is like to be a dark morning and foggy—we may still escape before Master Philip brings the watch upon us.”

They moved briskly away as she spoke, and her words were already growing indistinct in the distance, while I remained still, idly seeking the clue to their talk and muttering over and over again the name Clarence, which seemed familiar to me, when a cry of alarm, in which I recognised one of their voices, cut short my reverie. I crawled with all speed from my shelter, and stood up, being still in a line with the boards, and not easily distinguishable. As she had said, it was a dark morning; but the roofs of the houses—now high, now low—could be plainly discerned against a grey, drifting sky, wherein the first signs of dawn were visible; and the blank outlines of the streets which met at this point could be seen. Six or seven yards from me, in the middle of the roadway, stood three dusky figures, of whom I judged the nearer, from their attitudes, to be the two women. The farthest seemed to be a man,

I was astonished to see that he was standing cap in hand—nay, I was disappointed as well, for I had crept out hot-fisted, expecting to be called upon to defend the women. Despite the cry I had heard, they were talking to him quietly enough as far as I could hear. And in a minute or so I saw the taller woman give him something.

He took it with a low bow, and appeared almost to sweep the dirt with his bonnet. She waved her hand in dismissal, and he stood back still uncovered. And—hey, presto!—the women tripped swiftly away.

By this time my curiosity was immensely excited, but, for a moment, I thought it was doomed to disappointment. I thought that it was all over. It was not, by any means. The man stood looking after them until they reached the corner, and the moment they had passed it, he followed. His stealthy manner of going, and his fashion of peering after them, was enough for me. I guessed at once that he was dogging them, following them unknown to them and against their will; and with considerable elation I started after him, using the same precautions. What was sauce for the geese was sauce for the gander! So we went, two—one—one, slipping after one another through half-

a-dozen dark streets, tending generally southwards.

Following him in this way I seldom caught a glimpse of the women. The man kept at a considerable distance behind them, and I had my attention fixed on him. But once or twice, when, turning a corner, I all but trod on his heels, I saw them; and presently an odd point about them struck me. There was a white kerchief or something attached apparently to the back of the one's cloak, which considerably assisted my stealthy friend to keep them in view. It puzzled me. Was it a signal to him? Was he really all the time acting in concert with them; and was I throwing away my pains? Or was the white object which so betrayed them merely the result of carelessness, and the lack of foresight of women grappling with a condition of things to which they were unaccustomed? Of course I could not decide this, the more as at that distance I failed to distinguish what the white something was, or even which of the two wore it.

Presently I got a clue to our position, for we crossed Cheapside close to Paul's Cross, which my childish memories of the town enabled me to recognise, even by that light. Here my friend looked up and down, and hung a minute on his

heel before he followed the women, as if expecting or looking for some one. It might be that he was trying to make certain that the watch were not in sight. They were not, at any rate. Probably they had gone home to bed, for the morning was growing. After a momentary hesitation, he plunged into the narrow street down which the women had flitted.

He had only gone a few yards when I heard him cry out. The next instant, almost running against him myself, I saw what had happened. The women had craftily lain in wait for him in the little court into which the street ran, and had caught him as neatly as could be. When I came upon them, the taller woman was standing at bay with a passion that was almost fury in her pose and gesture. Her face, from which the hood of a coarse cloak had fallen back, was pale with anger; her grey eyes flashed; her teeth glimmered. Seeing her thus, and seeing the burden she carried under her cloak—which instinct told me was her child—I thought of a tigress brought to bay.

“You lying knave!” she hissed. “You Judas!”

The man recoiled a couple of paces, and in recoiling nearly touched me.

“What would you?” she continued. “What

do you want? What would you do? You have been paid to go. Go, and leave us!"

"I dare not, madame," he muttered, keeping away from her as if he dreaded a blow. She looked a woman who could deal a blow, a woman who could both love and hate fiercely and openly—as proud and frank and haughty a lady as I had ever seen in my life. "I dare not," he muttered sullenly; "I have my orders."

"Oh!" she cried, with scorn. "You have your orders, have you? The murder is out. But from whom, sirrah? Whose orders are to supersede mine? I would King Harry were alive, and I would have you whipped to Tyburn. Speak, rogue; who bade you follow me?"

He shook his head.

She looked about her wildly, passionately, and I saw that she was at her wits' end what to do, or how to escape him. But she was a woman. When she next spoke there was a marvellous change in her. Her face had grown soft; her voice low. "Philip," she said gently, "the purse was light. I will give you more. I will give you treble the amount within a few weeks, and I will thank you on my knees, and my husband shall be such a friend to you as you have never dreamed of, if you will only go home and be

silent. Only that — or, better still, walk the streets an hour, and then report that you lost sight of us. Think, man, think!" she cried with energy—"the times may change. A little more, and Wyatt had been master of London last year. Now the people are fuller of discontent than ever, and these burnings and torturings, these Spaniards in the streets—England will not endure them long. The times will change. Let us go, and you will have a friend—when most you need one."

He shook his head sullenly. "I dare not do it," he said. And somehow I got the idea that he was telling the truth, and that it was not the man's own will that withstood the bribe and the plea. He spoke as if he were repeating a lesson and the master were present.

When she saw that she could not move him, the anger which I think came more naturally to her broke out afresh. "You will not, you mean, you hound!" she cried. "Will neither threats nor promises move you?"

"Neither," he answered doggedly; "I have my orders."

So far, I had remained a quiet listener, standing in the mouth of the lane which opened upon

the court where they were. The women had taken no notice of me; either because they did not see me, or because, seeing me, they thought that I was a hanger-on of the man before them. And he, having his back to me, and his eyes on them, could not see me. It was a surprise to him—a very great surprise, I think—when I took three steps forward, and gripped him by the scruff of his neck.

“You have your orders, have you?” I muttered in his ear, as I shook him to and fro, while the taller woman started back and the younger uttered a cry of alarm at my sudden appearance. “Well, you will not obey them. Do you hear? Your employer may go hang! You will do just what these ladies please to ask of you.”

He struggled an instant; but he was an undersized man, and he could not loosen the hold which I had secured at my leisure. Then I noticed his hand going to his girdle in a suspicious way. “Stop that!” I said, flashing before his eyes a short, broad blade, which had cut many a deer’s throat in Old Arden Forest. “You had better keep quiet, or it will be the worse for you! Now, mistress,” I continued, “you can dispose of this little man as you please.”

"Who are you?" she said, after a pause, during which she had stared at me in open astonishment. No doubt I was a wild-looking figure.

"A friend," I replied. "Or one who would be such. I saw this fellow follow you, and I followed him. For the last five minutes I have been listening to your talk. He was not amenable to reason then, but I think he will be now. What shall I do with him?"

She smiled faintly, but did not answer at once, the coolness and resolution with which she had faced him before failing her now; possibly in sheer astonishment, or because my appearance at her side, by removing the strain, sapped the strength. "I do not know," she said at length, in a vague, puzzled tone.

"Well," I answered. "You are going to the Lion Wharf, and——"

"Oh, you fool!" she screamed out loud. "Oh, you fool!" she repeated, bitterly. "Now you have told him all."

I stood confounded. My cheeks burned with shame, and her look of contempt cut me like a knife. That the reproach was deserved I knew at once, for the man in my grasp gave a start, which proved that the information was not lost

upon him. "Who told you?" the woman went on, clutching the child jealously to her breast, as though she saw herself menaced afresh. "Who told you about the Lion Wharf?"

"Never mind," I answered gloomily. "I have made a mistake, but it is easy to remedy it." And I took out my knife again. "Do you go on and leave us."

I hardly know whether I meant my threat or not. But my prisoner had no doubts. He shrieked out—a wild cry of fear which rang round the empty court—and by a rapid blow, despair giving him courage, he dashed the hunting-knife from my hand. This done he first flung himself on me, then tried by a sudden jerk to free himself. In a moment we were down on the stones, and tumbling over one another in the dirt, while he struggled to reach his knife, which was still in his girdle, and I strove to prevent him. The fight was sharp, but it lasted barely a minute. When the first effort of his despair was spent, I came uppermost, and he was but a child in my hands. Presently with my knee on his chest I looked up. The women were still there, the younger clinging to the other.

"Go! go!" I cried impatiently. Each second

I expected the court to be invaded, for the man had screamed more than once.

Still they hesitated. I had been forced to hurt him a little, and he was moaning piteously. "Who are you?" the elder woman asked—she who had spoken all through.

"Nay, never mind that!" I answered. "Do you go! Go while you can. You know the way to the wharf."

"Yes," she answered. "But I cannot go and leave him at your mercy. Remember he is a man, and has——"

"He is a treacherous scoundrel," I answered, giving his throat a squeeze. "But he shall have one more chance. Listen, sirrah!" I continued to the man, "and stop that noise or I will knock out your teeth with my dagger-hilt. Listen and be silent. I shall go with these ladies, and I promise you this. If they are stopped or hindered on their way, or if evil happen to them at that wharf, whose name you had better forget, it will be the worse for you. Do you hear? You will suffer for it, though there be a dozen guards about you! Mind you," I added, "I have nothing to lose myself, for I am desperate already."

He vowed, the poor craven, with his stuttering

tongue, that he would be true, and vowed it again and again. But I saw that his eyes did not meet mine. They glanced instead at the knife-blade, and I knew even while I pretended to trust him that he would betray us. My real hope lay in his fears, and in this, that as the fugitives knew the way to the wharf, and it could not now be far distant, we might reach it, and go on board some vessel—I had gathered they were flying the country—before this wretch could recover himself and get together a force to stop us. That was my real hope, and in that hope only I left him.

We went as fast as the women could walk. I did not trouble them with questions; indeed, I had myself no more leisure than enabled me to notice their general appearance, which was that of comfortable tradesmen's womenfolk. Their cloaks and hoods were plainly fashioned, and of coarse stuff; their shoes were thick, and no jewel or scrap of lace peeping out betrayed them. Yet there was something in their carriage which could not be hidden, something which, to my eye, told tales: so that minute by minute I became more sure that this was really an adventure worth pursuing, and that London had kept a reward in store for me besides its cold stones and inhospitable streets.

The city was beginning to rouse itself. As we flitted through the lanes and alleys which lie between Cheapside and the river, we met many people, chiefly of the lower classes, on their way to work. In spite of this, we had no need to fear observation, for, though the morning was fully come, with the light had arrived such a thick, choking, yellow fog as I, being for the most part country-bred, had never experienced. It was so dense and blinding that we had a difficulty in keeping together, and even hand in hand could scarcely see one another. In my wonder how my companions found their way, I presently failed to notice their condition, and only remarked the distress and exhaustion which one of them was suffering, when she began, notwithstanding all her efforts, to lag behind. Then I sprang forward, blaming myself much. "Forgive me," I said. "You are tired, and no wonder. Let me carry the child, mistress."

Exhausted as she was, she drew away from me jealously. "No," she panted. "We are nearly there. I am better now." And she strained the child closer to her, and looked at me askance, as though she feared I might take it from her by force.

"Well, if you will not trust me," I answered,

"let your friend carry it for a time. I can see you are tired out."

Through the mist she bent forward, and peered into my face, her eyes scarcely a foot from mine. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy her. She drew a long breath and held out her burden. "No," she said; "you shall take him. I will trust you."

I took the little wrapped-up thing as gently as I could. "You shall not repent it, if I can help it, Mistress——"

"Bertram," she said.

"Mistress Bertram," I repeated. "Now let us go on and lose no time."

A walk of a hundred yards or so brought us clear of the houses, and revealed before us, in place of all else, a yellow curtain of fog. Below this, at our feet, yet apparently a long way from us, was a strange, pale line of shimmering light, which they told me was the water. At first I could hardly believe this. But, pausing a moment while my companions whispered together, dull creakings and groanings and uncouth shouts and cries, and at last the regular beat of oars, came to my ears out of the bank of vapour, and convinced me that we really had the river before us.

Mistress Bertram turned to me abruptly.

"Listen," she said, "and decide for yourself, my friend. We are close to the wharf now, and in a few minutes shall know our fate. It is possible that we may be intercepted at this point, and if that happen, it will be bad for me and worse for any one aiding me. You have done us gallant service, but you are young; and I am loth to drag you into perils which do not belong to you. Take my advice, then, and leave us now. I would I could reward you," she added, hastily, "but that knave has my purse."

I put the child gently back into her arms. "Good-bye," she said, with more feeling. "We thank you. Some day I may return to England, and have ample power——"

"Not so fast," I answered stiffly. "Did you think it possible, mistress, that I would desert you now? I gave you back the child only because it might hamper me, and will be safer with you. Come, let us on at once to the wharf."

"You mean it?" she said.

"Of a certainty!" I answered, settling my cap on my head with perhaps a boyish touch of the braggart.

At any rate, she did not take me at once at my word; and her thought for me touched me

the more because I judged her—I know not exactly why—to be a woman not over-prone to think of others. “Do not be reckless,” she said slowly, her eyes intently fixed on mine. “I should be sorry to bring evil upon you. You are but a boy.”

“And yet,” I answered, smiling, “there is as good as a price upon my head already. I should be reckless if I stayed here. If you will take me with you, let us go. We have loitered too long already.”

She turned then, asking no questions; but she looked at me from time to time in a puzzled way, as though she thought she ought to know me—as though I reminded her of some one. Paying little heed to this then, I hurried her and her companion down to the water, traversing a stretch of foreshore strewn with piles of wood and stacks of barrels and old rotting boats, between which the mud lay deep. Fortunately it was high tide, and so we had not far to go. In a minute or two I distinguished the hull of a ship looming large through the fog; and a few more steps placed us safely on a floating raft, on the far side of which the vessel lay moored.

There was only one man to be seen lounging on the raft, and the neighbourhood was quiet.

My spirits rose as I looked round. "Is this the *Whelp*?" the tall lady asked. I had not heard the other open her mouth since the encounter in the court.

"Yes, it is the *Whelp*, madame," the man answered, saluting her and speaking formally, and with a foreign accent. "You are the lady who is expected?"

"I am," she answered, with authority. "Will you tell the captain that I desire to sail immediately, without a moment's delay? Do you understand?"

"Well, the tide is going out," quoth the sailor, dubiously, looking steadily into the fog, which hid the river. "It has just turned, it is true. But as to sailing——"

She cut him short. "Go, go, man! Tell your captain what I say. And let down a ladder for us to come on board."

He caught a rope which hung over the side, and, swinging himself up, disappeared. We stood below, listening to the weird sounds which came off the water, the creaking and flapping of masts and canvas, the whirr of wings and shrieks of unseen gulls, the distant hail of boatmen. A bell in the city solemnly tolled eight. The younger woman shivered. The elder's foot tapped im-

patiently on the planks. Shut in by the yellow walls of fog, I experienced a strange sense of solitude; it was as if we three were alone in the world—we three who had come together so strangely.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTER CLARENCE.

WE had stood thus a few moments when a harsh voice hailing us from above put an end to our several thoughts and forebodings. We looked up and I saw half-a-dozen night-capped heads thrust over the bulwarks. A rope ladder came hurtling down at our feet, and a man nimbly descending held it tight at the bottom. "Now, madame!" he said briskly. They all, I noticed, had the same foreign accent, yet all spoke English; a singularity I did not understand, until I learned later that the boat was the *Lion's Whelp*, trading between London and Calais, and manned from the latter place.

Mistress Bertram ascended quickly and steadily, holding the baby in her arms. The other made some demur, lingering at the foot of the ladder and looking up as if afraid, until her companion chid her sharply. Then she, too, went up, but as she passed me—I was holding one side of the

ladder steady—she shot at me from under her hood a look which disturbed me strangely.

It was the first time I had seen her face, and it was such a face as a man rarely forgets. Not because of its beauty; rather because it was a speaking face, a strange and expressive one, which the dark waving hair swelling in thick clusters upon either temple seemed to accentuate. The features were regular, but, the full red lips excepted, rather thin than shapely. The nose, too, was prominent. But the eyes! The eyes seemed to glorify the dark brilliant thinness of the face and to imprint it upon the memory. They were dark flashing eyes, and their smile seemed to me perpetually to challenge, to allure and repulse, and even to goad. Sometimes they were gay, more rarely sad, sometimes soft, and again hard as steel. They changed in a moment as one or another approached her. But always at their gayest, there was a suspicion of weariness and fatigue in their depths. Or so I thought later.

Something of this flashed through my mind as I followed her up the side. But once on board and with the deck before me, I forgot her in the novelty of my position. The *Whelp* was decked fore and aft only, the blackness of the hold gaping amidships, spanned by a narrow gangway,

which served to connect the two decks. We found ourselves in the fore-part, amid coils of rope and windlasses and water-casks; surrounded by half a dozen wild-looking sailors wearing blue-knitted frocks and carrying sheath-knives at their girdles.

The foremost and biggest of these seemed to be the captain, although, so far as outward appearances went, the only difference between him and his crew lay in a marlin-spike which he wore slung to a thong beside his knife. When I reached the deck he was telling a long story to Mistress Bertram, and telling it very slowly. But the drift of it I soon gathered. While the fog lasted he could not put to sea.

"Nonsense!" cried my masterful companion, chafing at his slowness of speech. "Why not? Would it be dangerous?"

"Well, madam, it would be dangerous," he answered, more slowly than ever. "Yes, it would be dangerous. And to put to sea in a fog? That is not seamanship. And your baggage has not arrived."

"Never mind my baggage!" she answered imperiously. "I have made other arrangements for it. Two or three things I know came on board last night. I want to start—to start at once; do you hear?"

The captain shook his head, and said sluggishly that it was impossible. Spitting on the deck, he ground his heel leisurely round in a knot-hole. "Impossible," he repeated; "it would not be seamanship to start in a fog. When the fog lifts we will go. 'Twill be all the same to-morrow. We shall lie at Leigh to-night, whether we go now or go when the fog lifts."

"At Leigh?"

"That is it, madame."

"And when will you go from Leigh?" she cried indignantly.

"Daybreak to-morrow," he answered. "You leave it to me, mistress," he continued, in a tone of rough patronage, "and you will see your good man before you expect it."

"But man!" she exclaimed, trembling with impotent rage, "did not Master Bertram engage you to bring me across whenever I might be ready? Ay, and pay you handsomely for it? Did he not, sirrah?"

"To be sure, to be sure!" replied the giant unmoved. "Using seamanship and not going to sea in a fog, if it please you."

"It does not please me!" she retorted. "And why stay at Leigh?"

He looked up at the rigging, then down at the deck. He set his heel in the knot-hole, and ground it round again. Then he looked at his questioner with a broad smile. "Well, mistress, for a very good reason. It is there your good man is waiting for you. Only," added this careful keeper of a secret, "he bade me not to tell any one."

She uttered a low cry, which might have been an echo of her baby's cooing, and convulsively clasped the child more tightly to her. "He is at Leigh!" she murmured, flushed and trembling, another woman altogether. Even her voice was wonderfully changed. "He is really at Leigh, you say?"

"To be sure!" replied the captain, with a portentous wink and a mysterious roll of the head. "He is there, safe enough! Safe enough, you may wager your handsome face to a rushlight. And we will be there to-night."

She started up with a wild gesture. For a moment she had sat down on a cask standing beside her, and forgotten our peril, and the probability that we might never see Leigh at all. Now, I have said she started up. "No, no!" she cried, struggling for breath and utterance. "Oh,

no! no! Let us go at once. We must start at once!" Her voice was hysterical in its sudden anxiety and terror, as the consciousness of our position rolled back upon her. "Captain! listen, listen!" she pleaded. "Let us start now, and my husband will give you double. I will promise you double whatever he promised if you will chance the fog."

I think all who heard her were moved, save the captain only. He rubbed his head and grinned. Slow and heavy, he saw nothing in her prayer save the freak of a woman wild to get to her man. He did not weigh her promise at a groat; she was but a woman. And being a foreigner, he did not perceive a certain air of breeding which might have influenced a native. He was one of those men against whose stupidity Father Carey used to say the gods fight in vain. When he answered good-naturedly, "No, no, mistress, it is impossible. It would not be seamanship," I felt that we might as well try to stop the ebbing tide as move him from his position.

The feeling was a maddening one. The special peril which menaced my companions I did not know; but I knew that they feared pursuit, and I had every reason to fear it for

myself. Yet at any moment, out of the fog which encircled us so closely that we could barely see the raft below, and the shore not at all, might come the tramp of hurrying feet and the stern hail of the law. It was maddening to think of this, and to know that we had only to cast off a rope or two in order to escape: and to know also that we were absolutely helpless.

I expected that Mistress Bertram, brave as she had shown herself, would burst into a passion of rage or tears. But apparently she had one hope left. She looked at me.

I tried to think—to think hard. Alas! I seemed only able to listen. An hour had gone by since we parted from that rascal in the court, and we might expect him to appear at any moment, vengeful and exultant, with a posse at his back. Yet I tried hard to think, and the fog presently suggested a possible course. “Look here,” I said suddenly, speaking for the first time; “if you do not start until the fog lifts, captain, we may as well breakfast ashore, and return presently.”

“That is as you please,” he answered, shrugging his shoulders indifferently.

“What do you think?” I said, turning to my

companions with as much carelessness as I could command. "Had we not better do that?"

Mistress Bertram did not understand, but in her despair she obeyed the motion of my hand mechanically, and walked to the side. The younger woman followed more slowly, so that I had to speak to her with some curtness, bidding her make haste; for I was in a fever now until we were clear of the *Whelp* and the Lion Wharf, it having struck me that if the ship were not to leave at once, we were nowhere in so much danger as on board. At large in the fog, we might escape detection for a time. Our pursuers might as well look for a needle in a haystack as seek us through it when once we were clear of the wharf. And this was not the end of my idea; but for the present it was enough. Therefore I took up Mistress Anne very short. "Come!" I said, "be quick! Let me help you."

She obeyed, and I was ashamed of my impatience when at the foot of the ladder she thanked me prettily. It was almost with good cheer in my voice and a rebound in my spirits that I explained, as I hurried my companions across the raft, what my plan was.

The moment we were ashore I felt safer. The fog swallowed us up quick, as the Bible

says. The very hull of the ship vanished from sight before we had gone half-a-dozen paces. I had never seen a London fog before, and to me it seemed portentous and providential: a marvel as great as the crimson hail which fell in the London gardens to mark Her Majesty's accession.

Yet, after all, without my happy thought the fog would have availed us little. We had scarcely gone a score of yards, before the cautious tread of several people hastening down the strand towards the wharf struck my ear. They were proceeding in silence, and we might not have noticed their approach if the foremost had not by chance tripped and fallen; whereupon one laughed and another swore. With a warning hand I grasped my companions' arms, and hurried them forward some paces until I felt sure that our figures could not be seen through the mist. Then I halted, and we stood listening, gazing into one another's strained eyes, while the steps came nearer and nearer, crossed our track, and then, with a noisy rush, thundered on the wooden raft. My ear caught the jingle of harness and the clank of weapons.

"It is the watch," I muttered. "Come, and make no noise. What I want is a little this

way. I fancy I saw it as we passed down to the wharf."

They turned with me, but we had not taken many steps before Mistress Anne, who was walking on my left side, stumbled over something. She tried to save herself, but failed and fell heavily, uttering as she did so a loud cry. I sprang to her assistance, and even before I raised her I laid my hand lightly on her mouth. "Hush!" I said softly; "for heaven's sake, make no noise. What is the matter?"

"Oh!" she moaned, making no effort to rise, "my ankle! my ankle! I am sure I have broken it."

I murmured my dismay, while Mistress Bertram, stooping anxiously, examined the injured limb. "Can you stand?" she asked.

But it was no time for questioning, and I put her aside. The men who had passed were within easy hearing, and if there should be one among them familiar with the girl's voice, we might be pounced upon, fog or no fog. I felt that it was no time for ceremony, and picked Mistress Anne up in my arms, whispering to the elder woman, "Go on ahead! I think I see the boat. It is straight before you."

Luckily I was right: it was the boat; and so

far well. But at the moment I spoke I heard a sudden outcry behind us, and knew the hunt was up. I plunged forward with my burden, recklessly and blindly, through mud and over obstacles. The wherry for which I was making was moored in the water a few feet from the edge. I had remarked it idly and without purpose as we came down to the wharf, and had even noticed that the oars were lying in it. Now, if we could reach it and start down the river for Leigh, we might by possibility gain that place, and meet Mistress Bertram's husband.

At any rate, nothing in the world seemed so desirable to me at the moment as the shelter of that boat. I plunged through the mud and waded desperately through the water to it, Mistress Bertram scarce a whit behind me. I reached it, but reached it only as the foremost pursuer caught sight of us. I heard his shout of triumph, and somehow I bundled my burden into the boat. I remember that she clung about my neck in fear, and I had to loosen her hands roughly. But I did loosen them—in time. With one stroke of my hunting-knife I severed the rope, and, pushing off the boat with all my strength, sprang into it as it floated away—and was in time. But one second's delay would have un-

done us. Two men were already in the water up to their knees, and their very breath was hot on my face as we swung out into the stream.

Fortunately, I had had experience of boats on the Avon, at Bideford and Stratford, and could pull a good oar. For a moment, indeed, the wherry rolled and dipped as I snatched up the sculls; but I quickly got her in hand, and, bending to my work, sent her spinning through the mist, every stroke I pulled increasing the distance between us and our now unseen foes. Happily we were below London Bridge, and had not that dangerous passage to make. The river, too, was nearly clear of craft, and though once and again in the Pool a huge hulk loomed suddenly across our bows, and then faded behind us into the mist like some monstrous phantom, and so told of a danger narrowly escaped, I thought it best to run all risks, and go ahead as long as the tide should ebb.

It was strange how suddenly we had passed from storm into calm. Mistress Anne had bound her ankle with a handkerchief, and bravely made light of the hurt; and now the two women sat crouching in the stern, watching me, their heads together, their faces pale. The mist had closed round us, and we were alone again, gliding over

the bosom of the great river that runs down to the sea. I was oddly struck by the strange current of life which for a week had tossed me from one adventure to another, only to bring me into contact at length with these two, and sweep me into the unknown whirlpool of their fortunes.

Who were they? A merchant's wife and her sister, flying from Bishop Bonner's inquisition? I thought it likely. Their cloaks and hoods, indeed, and all that I could see of their clothes, fell below such a condition; but probably they were worn as a disguise. Their speech rose as much above it, but I knew that of late many merchants' wives had become scholars, and might pass in noble-men's houses: even as in those days, when London waxed fat and set up and threw down governments, every alderman had come to ride in mail.

No doubt the women, watching me in anxious silence, were as curious about me. I still bore the stains of country travel. I was unwashen, unkempt, my doublet was torn, the cloak I had cast at my feet was the very wreck of a cloak. Yet I read no distrust in their looks. The elder's brave eyes seemed ever thanking me. I never saw her lips move silently that they did not shape

“Well done!” And though I caught Mistress Anne scanning me once or twice with an expression I could ill interpret, a smile took its place the moment her gaze met mine.

We had passed, but were still in sight of, Greenwich Palace—as they told me—when the mist rose suddenly like a curtain rolled away, and the cold bright February sun, shining out, disclosed the sparkling river with the green hills rising on our right hand. Here and there on its surface a small boat such as our own moved to and fro, and in the distant Pool from which we had come rose a little forest of masts. I hung on the oars a moment, and my eyes were drawn to a two-masted vessel which, nearly half a mile below us, was drifting down, gently heeling over with the current as the crew got up the sails. “I wonder whither she is bound,” I said thoughtfully, “and whether they would take us on board by any chance?”

Mistress Bertram shook her head. “I have no money,” she answered sadly. “I fear we must go on to Leigh if it be any way possible. You are tired, and no wonder. But what is it?” with a sudden change of voice. “What is the matter?”

I had flashed out the oars with a single touch, and began to pull as fast as I could down the

stream. No doubt my face, too, proclaimed my discovery and awoke her fears. "Look behind!" I muttered between my set teeth.

She turned, and uttered a low cry. A wherry like our own, but even lighter—in my first glance up the river I had not noticed it—had stolen nearer to us, and yet nearer, and now throwing aside disguise was in hot pursuit of us. There were three men on board, two rowing and one steering. When they saw that we had discovered them they hailed us in a loud voice, and I heard the steerman's feet rattle on the boards, as he cried to his men to give way, and stamped in very eagerness. My only reply was to take a longer stroke, and, pulling hard, to sweep away from them.

But presently my first strength died away, and the work began to tell upon me, and little by little they overhauled us. Not that I gave up at once for that. They were still some sixty yards behind, and for a few minutes at any rate I might put off capture. In that time something might happen. At the worst they were only three to one, and their boat looked light and cranky and easy to upset.

So I pulled on, savagely straining at the oars. But my chest heaved and my arms ached more

and more with each stroke. The banks slid by us; we turned one bend, then another, though I saw nothing of them. I saw only the pursuing boat, on which my eyes were fixed, heard only the measured rattle of the oars in the rowlocks. A minute, two minutes, three minutes passed. They had not gained on us, but the water was beginning to waver before my eyes, their boat seemed floating in the air, there was a pulsation in my ears louder than that of the oars. I struggled and yet I flagged. My knees trembled. Their boat shot nearer now, nearer and nearer, so that I could read the smile of triumph on the steerman's dark face and hear his cry of exultation. Nearer! and then with a cry I dropped the oars.

"Quick!" I panted to my companions. "Change places with me! So!" Trembling and out of breath as I was I crawled between the women, and gained the sternsheets of the boat. As I passed Mistress Bertram she clutched my arm. Her eyes as they met mine flashed fire; her lips were white. "The man steering!" she hissed between her teeth. "Leave the others. He is Clarence, and I fear him!"

I nodded; but still as the hostile boat bore swiftly down upon us I cast a glance round to see if there was any help at hand. I saw no sign of

any. I saw only the pale blue sky overhead, and the stream flowing swiftly under the boat. I drew my sword. The case was one rather for despair than courage. The women were in my charge, and if I did not acquit myself like a man now, when should I do so? Bah! it would soon be over.

There was an instant's confusion in the other boat, as the crew ceased rowing, and, seeing my attitude and not liking it, changed their seats. To my joy the man who had hitherto been steering flung a curse at the others and came forward to bear the brunt of the encounter. He was a tall sinewy man past middle age, with a clean-shaven face, a dark complexion and cruel eyes. So he was Master Clarence! Well, he had the air of a swordsman and a soldier. I trembled for the women.

"Surrender, you fool!" he cried to me harshly. "In the Queen's name—do you hear? What do you do in this company?"

I answered nothing, for I was out of breath. But softly, my eyes on his, I drew out with my left hand my hunting-knife. If I could beat aside his sword, I would spring upon him and drive the knife home with that hand. So, standing erect in bow and stern we faced one another, the man and the boy, the flush of rage and exertion on

my cheek, a dark shade on his. And silently the boats drew together.

Thought is quick, quicker than anything else in the world, I suppose, for in some drawn-out second before the boats came together I had time to wonder where I had seen his face before, and to rack my memory. I knew no Master Clarence, yet I had seen this man somewhere. Another second, and away with thought! He was crouching for a spring. I drew back a little, then lunged—lunged with heart and hand. Our swords crossed and whistled—just crossed—and even as I saw his eyes gleam behind his point, the shock of the two boats coming together flung us both backwards and apart. A moment we reeled, staggering and throwing out wild hands. I strove hard to recover myself, nay, I almost did so; then I caught my foot in Mistress Anne's cloak, which she had left in her place, and fell heavily back into the boat.

I was up in a moment—on my knees at least—and unhurt. But another was before me. As I stooped half-risen, I saw one moment a dark shadow above me, and the next a sheet of flame shone before my eyes, and a tremendous shock swept all away. I fell senseless into the bottom of the boat, knowing nothing of what had happened to me.

CHAPTER VII.

ON BOARD THE "FRAMLINGHAM."

I AM told by people who have been sea-sick that the sound of the waves beating against the hull comes in time to be an intolerable torment. But bad at this may be, it can be nothing in comparison with the pains I suffered from the same cause as I recovered my senses. My brain seemed to be a cavern into which each moment, with a rhythmical regularity which added the pangs of anticipation to those of reality, the sea rushed, booming and thundering, jarring every nerve and straining the walls to bursting, and making each moment of consciousness a vivid agony. And this lasted long: how long I cannot say. But it had subsided somewhat when I first opened my eyes, and dully, not daring to move my head, looked up.

I was lying on my back. About a foot from my eyes were rough beams of wood, disclosed by a smoky yellow light, which flickered on the knot-

holes and rude joists. The light swayed to and fro regularly; and this adding to my pain, I closed my eyes with a moan. Then some one came to me, and I heard voices which sounded a long way off, and promptly fell again into a deep sleep, troubled still, but less painfully, by the same rhythmical shocks, the same dull crashings in my brain.

When I awoke again I had sense to know what caused this, and where I was—in a berth on board ship. The noise which had so troubled me was that of the waves beating against her fore-foot. The beams so close to my face formed the deck, the smoky light came from the ship's lantern swinging on a hook. I tried to turn. Some one came again, and with gentle hands arranged my pillow, and presently began to feed me with a spoon. When I had swallowed a few mouthfuls I gained strength to turn.

Who was this feeding me? The light was at her back and dazzled me. For a short time I took her for Petronilla, my thoughts going back at one bound to Coton, and skipping all that had happened since I left home. But as I grew stronger I grew clearer, and recalling bit by bit what had happened in the boat, I recognised Mistress Anne. I tried to murmur my thanks,

but she laid a cool finger on my lips and shook her head, smiling on me.

"You must not talk," she murmured, "you are getting well. Now go to sleep again."

I shut my eyes at once as a child might. Another interval of unconsciousness, painless this time, followed, and again I awoke. I was lying on my side now, and without moving could see the whole of the tiny cabin. The lantern still hung and smoked. But the light was steady now, and I heard no splashing without, nor the dull groaning and creaking of the timbers within. There reigned a quiet which seemed bliss to me; and I lay wrapped in it, my thoughts growing clearer and clearer each moment.

On a sea-chest at the farther end of the cabin two people were sitting engaged in talk. The one, a woman, I recognised immediately. The grey eyes full of command, the handsome features, the reddish-brown hair and gracious figure left me in no doubt even for a moment that I looked upon Mistress Bertram. The sharer of her seat was a tall thin man with a thoughtful face and dreamy, rather melancholy, eyes. One of her hands rested on his knee, and her lips as she talked were close to his ear. A little aside, sitting on the lowest step of the ladder which led to the deck, her

head leaning against the timbers, and a cloak about her, was Mistress Anne.

I tried to speak, and after more than one effort found my voice. "Where am I?" I whispered. My head ached sadly, and I fancied, though I was too languid to raise my hand to it, that it was bandaged. My mind was so far clear that I remembered Master Clarence and his pursuit, and the fight in the boats, and knew that we ought to be on our way to prison. Who, then, was the mild, comely gentleman whose length of limb made the cabin seem smaller than it was? Not a gaoler, surely? Yet who else?

I could compass no more than a whisper, but faint as my voice was, they all heard me, and looked up. "Anne!" the elder lady cried sharply, seeming by her tone to direct the other to attend to me. Yet was she herself the first to rise, and come and lay her hand on my brow. "Ah! the fever is gone!" she said, speaking apparently to the gentleman, who kept his seat. "His head is quite cool. He will do well now, I am sure. Do you know me?" she continued, leaning over me.

I looked up into her eyes and read only kindness. "Yes," I muttered. But the effort of looking was so painful that I closed my eyes again with a sigh. Nevertheless my memory of the

events which had gone before my illness grew clearer, and I fumbled feebly for something which should have been at my side.

"Where is—where is my sword?" I made shift to whisper.

She laughed.

"Show it to him, Anne," she said; "what a never-die it is! There, Master Knight Errant, we did not forget to bring it off the field, you see!"

"But how," I murmured, "how did you escape?" I saw that there was no question of a prison. Her laugh was gay, her voice full of content.

"That is a long story," she answered kindly. "Are you well enough to hear it? You think you are? Then take some of this first. You remember that knave Philip striking you on the head with an oar as you got up? No? Well, it was a cowardly stroke, but it stood him in little stead, for we had drifted, in the excitement of the race, under the stern of the ship which you remember seeing a little before. There were English seamen on her; and when they saw three men in the act of boarding two defenceless women, they stepped in, and threatened to send Clarence and his crew to the bottom unless they sheered off."

"Ha!" I murmured. "Good!"

"And so we escaped. I prayed the captain to take us on board his ship, the *Framlingham*, and he did so. More, putting into Leigh on his way to the Nore, he took off my husband. There he stands, and when you are better he shall thank you."

"Nay, he will thank you now," said the tall man, rising and stepping to my berth with his head bent. He could not stand upright, so low was the deck. "But for you," he continued, his earnestness shown in his voice and eyes—the latter were almost too tender for a man's—"my wife would be now lying in prison, her life in jeopardy, and her property as good as gone. She has told me how bravely you rescued her from that cur in Cheapside, and how your presence of mind baffled the watch at the river-side. It is well, young gentleman. It is very well. But these things call for other returns than words. When it lies in her power my wife will make them, if not to-day, to-morrow, and if not to-morrow, the day after."

I was very weak, and his words brought the tears to my eyes. "She has saved my life already," I murmured.

"You foolish boy!" she cried, smiling down on me, her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"You got your head broken in my defence. It was a great thing, was it not, that I did not leave you to die in the boat? There, make haste and get well. You have talked enough now. Go to sleep, or we shall have the fever back again."

"One thing first," I pleaded. "Tell me whither we are going."

"In a few hours we shall be at Dordt in Holland," she answered. "But be content. We will take care of you, and send you back if you will, or you shall still come with us; as you please. Be content. Go to sleep now and get strong. Presently, perhaps, we shall have need of your help again."

They went and sat down then on their former seat and talked in whispers, while Mistress Anne shook up my pillows, and laid a fresh cool bandage on my head. I was too weak to speak my gratitude, but I tried to look it, and so fell asleep again, her hand in mine, and the wondrous smile of those lustrous eyes the last impression of which I was conscious.

A long, dreamless sleep followed. When I awoke once more the light still hung steady, but the peacefulness of night was gone. We lay in the midst of turmoil. The scampering of feet over

the deck above me, the creaking of the windlass, the bumping and clattering of barrels hoisted in or hoisted out, the harsh sound of voices raised in a foreign tongue and in queer keys, sufficed as I grew wide awake to tell me we were in port.

But the cabin was empty, and I lay for some time gazing at its dreary interior, and wondering what was to become of me. Presently an uneasy fear crept into my mind. What if my companions had deserted me? Alone, ill, and penniless in a foreign land, what should I do? This fear in my sick state was so terrible that I struggled to get up, and with reeling brain and nerveless hands did get out of my berth. But this feat accomplished I found that I could not stand. Everything swam before my eyes. I could not take a single step, but remained clinging helplessly to the edge of my berth, despair at my heart. I tried to call out, but my voice rose little above a whisper, and the banging and shrieking, the babel without, went on endlessly. Oh, it was cruel! cruel! They had left me!

I think my senses were leaving me too, when I felt an arm about my waist, and found Mistress Anne by my side guiding me to the chest. I sat down on it, the certainty of my helplessness and the sudden relief of her presence bringing the

tears to my eyes. She fanned me, and gave me some restorative, chiding me the while for getting out of my berth.

"I thought that you had gone and left me," I muttered. I was as weak as a child.

She said cheerily: "Did you leave us when we were in trouble? Of course you did not. There, take some more of this. After all, it is well you are up, for in a short time we must move you to the other boat."

"The other boat?"

"Yes, we are at Dordt, you know. And we are going by the Waal, a branch of the Rhine, to Arnheim. But the boat is here close to this one, and, with help, I think you will be able to walk to it."

"I am sure I shall if you will give me your arm," I answered gratefully.

"But you will not think again," she replied, "that we have deserted you?"

"No," I said. "I will trust you always."

I wondered why a shadow crossed her face at that. But I had no time to do more than wonder, for Master Bertram, coming down, brought our sitting to an end. She bustled about to wrap me up, and somehow, partly walking, partly carried, I was got on deck. There I sat down on a

bale to recover myself, and felt at once much the better for the fresh keen air, the clear sky, and wintry sunshine which welcomed me to a foreign land.

On the outer side of the vessel stretched a wide expanse of turbid water, five or six times as wide as the Thames at London, and foam-flecked here and there by the up-running tide. On the other side was a wide and spacious quay, paved neatly with round stones, and piled here and there with merchandise, but possessing, by virtue of the lines of leafless elms which bordered it, a quaint air of rusticity in the midst of bustle. The sober bearing of the sturdy landsmen going quietly about their business accorded well with the substantial comfort of the rows of tall, steeped-roofed houses I saw beyond the quay, and seemed only made more homely by the occasional swagger and uncouth cry of some half-barbarous seaman, wandering aimlessly about. Above the town rose the heavy square tower of a church, a notable landmark where all around, land and water, lay so low, where the horizon seemed so far, and the sky so wide and breezy.

"So you have made up your mind to come with us," said Master Bertram, returning to my side—he had left me to make some arrangements.

"You understand that if you would prefer to go home I can secure your tendance here by good, kindly people, and provide for your passage back when you feel strong enough to cross. You understand that? And that the choice is entirely your own? So which will you do?"

I changed colour, and felt I did. I shrank, as being well and strong I should not have shrunk, from losing sight of those three faces which I had known for so short a time, yet which alone stood between myself and loneliness. "I would rather come with you," I stammered. "But I shall be a great burden to you now, I fear."

"It is not that," he replied with hearty assurance in his voice. "A week's rest and quiet will restore you to strength, and then the burden will be on the other shoulder. It is for your own sake I give you the choice, because our future is for the time uncertain. Very uncertain," he repeated, his brow clouding over, "and to become our companion may expose you to fresh dangers. We are refugees from England; that you probably guess. Our plan was to go to France, where are many of our friends, and where we could live safely until better times. You know how that plan was frustrated. Here the Spaniards are masters—Prince Philip's people: and if we are re-

cognised, we shall be arrested and sent back to England. Still, my wife and I must make the best of it. The hue and cry will not follow us for some days, and there is still a degree of independence in the cities of Holland which may, since I have friends here, protect us for a time. Now you know something of our position, my friend. You can make your choice with your eyes open. Either way we shall not forget you."

"I will go on with you, if you please," I answered at once. "I, too, cannot go home." And as I said this, Mistress Bertram also came up, and I took her hand in mine—which looked, by the way, so strangely thin I scarcely recognised it—and kissed it. "I will come with you, madame, if you will let me," I said.

"Good!" she replied, her eyes sparkling. "I said you would! I do not mind telling you now that I am glad of it. And if ever we return to England, as God grant we may and soon, you shall not regret your decision. Shall he, Richard?"

"If you say he shall not, my dear," he responded, smiling at her enthusiasm, "I think I may answer for it he will not."

I was struck then, as I had been before, by a certain air of deference which the husband as-

sumed towards the wife. It did not surprise me, for her bearing and manner, as well as such of her actions as I had seen, stamped her as singularly self-reliant and independent for a woman: and to these qualities, as much as to the rather dreamy character of the husband, I was content to set down the peculiarity. I should add that a rare and pretty tenderness constantly displayed on her part towards him robbed it of any semblance of unseemliness.

They saw that the exertion of talking exhausted me, and so, with an encouraging nod, left me to myself. A few minutes later a couple of English sailors, belonging to the *Framlingham*, came up, and with gentle strength transported me, under Mistress Anne's directions, to a queer-looking, wide-beamed boat which lay almost alongside. She was more like a huge Thames barge than anything else, for she drew little water, but had a great expanse of sail when all was set. There was a large deck-house, gay with paint and as clean as it could be; and in a compartment at one end of this—which seemed to be assigned to our party—I was soon comfortably settled.

Exhausted as I was by the excitement of sitting up and being moved, I knew little of what passed about me for the next two days, and re-

member less. I slept and ate, and sometimes awoke to wonder where I was. But the meals and the vague attempts at thought made scarcely more impression on my mind than the sleep. Yet all the while I was gaining strength rapidly, my youth and health standing me in good stead. The wound in my head, which had caused great loss of blood, healed all one way, as we say in Warwickshire; and about noon on the second day after leaving Dordt I was well enough to reach the deck unassisted, and sit in the sunshine on a pile of rugs which Mistress Anne, my constant nurse, had laid for me in a corner sheltered from the wind.

Fortunately the weather was mild and warm, and the sunshine fell brightly on the wide river and the wider plain of pasture which stretched away on either side to the horizon; dotted here and there by a windmill, a farmhouse, the steeple of a church, the brown sails of a barge, or broken at most by a low dike or a line of sand-dunes. All was open, free: all was largeness, space, and distance. I gazed astonished.

The husband and wife, who were pacing the deck in the forepart, came to me. He noticed the wondering looks I cast round.

"This is new to you?" he said smiling.

"Quite—quite new," I answered. "I never imagined anything so flat, and yet in its way so beautiful."

"You do not know Lincolnshire?"

"No."

"Ah, that is my native county," he answered. "It is much like this. But you are better and you can talk again. Now I and my wife have been discussing whether we shall tell you more about ourselves. And since there is no time like the present I may say that we have decided to trust you."

"All in all or not at all," Mistress Bertram added brightly.

I murmured my thanks.

"Then, first to tell you who we are. For myself I am plain Richard Bertie, of Lincolnshire; at your service. My wife is something more than appears from this, or"—with a smile—"from her present not too graceful dress. She is——"

"Stop, Richard! This is not sufficiently formal," my lady cried prettily. "I have the honour to present to you, young gentleman," she went on, laughing merrily and making a very grand curtsy before me, "Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk."

I made shift to get to my feet, and bowed respectfully, but she forced me to sit down again.

"Enough of that," she said lightly, "until we go back to England. Here and for the future we are Master Bertram and his wife. And this young lady, my distant kinswoman, Anne Brandon, must pass as Mistress Anne. You wonder how we came to be straying in the streets alone and unattended when you found us?"

I did wonder, for the name of the gay and brilliant Duchess of Suffolk was well known even to me, a country lad. Her former husband, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, had been not only the one trusted and constant friend of King Henry the Eighth, but the king's brother-in-law, his first wife having been Mary, Princess of England and Queen Dowager of France. Late in his splendid and prosperous career the Duke had married Katherine, the heiress of Lord Willoughby de Eresby, and she it was who stood before me, still young and handsome. After her husband's death she had made England ring with her name, first by a love match with a Lincolnshire squire, and secondly by her fearless and outspoken defence of the reformers. I did wonder, indeed, how she had come to be wandering in the streets at day-break, an object of a chance passer's chivalry and pity.

"It is simple enough," she said drily. "I am

rich, I am a Protestant, and I have an enemy. When I do not like a person I speak out. Do I not, Richard?"

"You do indeed, my dear," he answered smiling.

"And once I spoke out to Bishop Gardiner. What! Do you know Stephen Gardiner?"

For I had started at the name; after which I could scarcely have concealed my knowledge if I would. I answered simply, "Yes, I have seen him." I was thinking how wonderful this was. These people had been utter strangers to me until a day or two before, yet now we were all looking out together from the deck of a Dutch boat on the low Dutch landscape, united by one tie, the enmity of the same man.

"He is a man to be dreaded," the Duchess continued, her eyes resting on her baby, which lay asleep on my bundle of rugs—and I guessed what fear it was had tamed her pride to flight. "His power in England is absolute. We learned that it was his purpose to arrest me, and determined to leave England. But our very household was full of spies, and though we chose a time when Clarence, our steward, whom we had long suspected of being Gardiner's chief tool, was away, Philip, his deputy, gained a clue to our design, and watched us. We

gave him the slip with difficulty, leaving our luggage, but he dogged and overtook us, and the rest you know."

I bowed. As I gazed at her, my admiration I know shone in my eyes. She looked, as she stood on the deck, an exile and a fugitive, so gay, so bright, so indomitable that in herself she was at once a warranty and an omen of better times. The breeze had heightened her colour, and loosened here and there a tress of her auburn hair. No wonder Master Bertie looked proudly on his Duchess.

Suddenly a thing I had clean forgotten flashed into my mind, and I thrust my hand into my pocket. The action was so abrupt that it attracted their attention, and when I pulled out a packet—two packets—there were three pairs of eyes upon me. The seal dangled from one missive. "What have you there?" the Duchess asked briskly, for she was a woman, and curious. "Do you carry the deeds of your property about with you?"

"No," I said, not unwilling to make a small sensation. "This touches your Grace?"

"Hush!" she cried, raising one imperious finger. "Transgressing already? From this time forth I am Mistress Bertram, remember. But

come," she went on, eyeing the packet with the seal inquisitively, "how does it touch me?"

I put it silently into her hands, and she opened it and read a few lines, her husband peeping over her shoulder. As she read her brow darkened, her eyes grew hard. Master Bertie's face changed with hers, and they both peeped suddenly at me over the edge of the parchment, suspicion and hostility in their glances. "How came you by this, young sir?" he said, slowly, after a long pause. "Have we escaped Peter to fall into the hands of Paul?"

"No, no!" I cried hurriedly. I saw that I had made a greater sensation than I had bargained for, and I hastened to tell them how I had met with Gardiner's servant at Stony Stratford, and how I had become possessed of his credentials. They laughed, of course—indeed they laughed so loudly that the placid Dutchmen standing aft with their hands in their breeches pockets stared open-mouthed at us, and the kindred cattle on the bank looked mildly up from the knee-deep grass.

"And what was the other packet?" the Duchess asked presently. "Is that it in your hand?"

"Yes," I answered, holding it up with some

reluctance. "It seems to be a letter addressed to Mistress Clarence."

"Clarence!" she cried, "Clarence!" arresting the hand she was extending. "What! Here is our friend again then. What is in it? You have opened it?"

"No."

"You have not? Then quick, open it!" she exclaimed impatiently. "This too touches us, I will bet a penny. Let us see at once what it contains. Clarence indeed! Perhaps we may have him on the hip yet, the arch-traitor!"

But I held the packet back, though my cheeks reddened and I knew I must needs seem foolish. They made certain that this letter was a communication to some spy, probably to Clarence himself under cover of a feminine address. Perhaps it was, but it bore a woman's name and it was sealed; and foolish though I might be, I would not betray the woman's secret.

"No, madam," I said confused, awkward, stammering, yet withholding it with a secret obstinacy, "pardon me if I do not obey you—if I do not let this be opened. It may be what you say," I added with an effort, "but it may also contain an honest secret, and that a woman's."

"What do you say?" cried the Duchess;

"hoity toity! here are scruples!" Whereat her husband smiled, and I looked in despair from him to Mistress Anne. Would she sympathise with my feelings? I found that she had turned her back on us, and was gazing over the side. "Do you really mean," the Duchess continued, tapping her foot sharply on the deck, "that you are not going to open that, you foolish boy?"

"I do—with your Grace's leave," I answered, humbly.

"Or without my Grace's leave! That is what you mean," she retorted pettishly, a red spot in each cheek. "When people will not do what I ask, it is always, Grace! Grace! Grace! But I know them now."

I dared not smile; and I would not look up, lest my heart should fail me and I should give her her way.

"You foolish boy!" she said again, and sniffed. Then with a toss of her head she went away, her husband following her obediently.

I feared that she was grievously offended, and I got up restlessly and went across the deck to the rail on which Mistress Anne was leaning, meaning to say something which should gain for me her sympathy, perhaps her advice. But the words died on my lips, for as I approached she

turned her face abruptly towards me, and it was so white, so haggard, so drawn, that I uttered a cry of alarm. "You are ill!" I exclaimed. "Let me call the Duchess!"

She gripped my sleeve almost fiercely. "Hush!" she muttered. "Do nothing of the kind. I am not well. It is the water. But it will pass off if you do not notice it. I hate to be noticed," she added, with an angry shrug.

I was full of pity for her and reproached myself sorely. "What a selfish brute I have been!" I said. "You have watched by me night after night, and nursed me day after day, and I have scarcely thanked you. And now you are ill yourself. I am afraid it is my fault!"

She looked at me, a wan smile on her face. "A little, perhaps," she answered faintly. "But it is chiefly the water. I shall be better presently. About that letter—did you not come to speak to me about it?"

"Never mind it now," I said anxiously. "Will you not lie down on the rugs awhile? Let me give you my place," I pleaded.

"No, no!" she cried impatiently; and seeing I vexed her by my importunity, I desisted. "The letter," she went on, "you will open it by-and-by?"

"No," I said slowly, considering, to tell the truth, the strength of my resolution, "I think I shall not."

"You will! you will!" she repeated, with a kind of scorn. "The Duchess will ask you again, and you will give it to her. Of course you will!"

Her tone was strangely querulous, and her eyes continually flashed keen biting glances at me. But I thought only that she was ill and excited, and I fancied it was best to humour her. "Well, perhaps I shall," I said soothingly. "Possibly. It is hard to refuse her anything. And yet I hope I may not. The girl—it may be a girl's secret——"

"Well?" she asked, interrupting me abruptly, her voice harsh and unmusical. "What of her?" She laid her hand on her bosom as though to still some secret pain. I looked at her, anxious and wondering, but she had again averted her face. "What of her?" she repeated.

"Only that—I would not willingly hurt her!" I blurted out.

She did not answer. She stood a moment, then to my surprise she turned away without a word, and merely commanding me by a gesture of the hand not to follow, walked slowly away. I

watched her cross the deck and pass through the doorway into the deckhouse. She did not once turn her face, and my only fear was that she was ill; more seriously ill, perhaps, than she had acknowledged.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOUSE OF PEACE.

As the day went on, therefore, I looked eagerly for Mistress Anne's return. But she appeared no more, though I maintained a close watch on the cabin door. All the afternoon, too, the Duchess kept away from me, and I feared that I had seriously offended her; so that it was with no very pleasant anticipations that, going into that part of the deckhouse which served us for a common room, to see if the evening meal was set, I found only the Duchess and Master Bertie prepared to sit down to it. I suppose that something of my feeling was expressed in my face, for while I was yet half-way between the door and the table, my lady gave way to a peal of merriment.

"Come, sit down, and do not be afraid!" she

cried pleasantly, her grey eyes still full of laughter. "I vow the lad thinks I shall eat him. Nay, when all is said and done, I like you the better, Sir Knight, for your scruples. I see that you are determined to act up to your name. But that reminds me," she added in a more serious vein, as I took my seat. "We have been frank with you. You must be equally frank with us. What are we to call you, pray?"

I looked down at my plate and felt my face grow scarlet. The wound which the discovery of my father's treachery had dealt me had begun to heal. In the action, the movement, the adventure of the last fortnight, I had well-nigh lost sight of the blot on my escutcheon, of the shame which had driven me from home. But the question, "What are we to call you?" revived the smart, and revived it with an added pang. It had been very well in theory to proudly discard my old name. It was painful in practice to be unable to answer the Duchess, "I am a Cludde of Coton, nephew to Sir Anthony, formerly esquire of the body to King Henry. I am no unworthy follower and associate even for you," and to have instead to reply, "I have no name. I am nobody. I have all to make and win." Yet this was my ill-fortune.

Her woman's eye saw my trouble, as I hesitated, confused and doubting what I should reply.

"Come!" she said good-naturedly, trying to reassure me. "You are of gentle birth. Of that we feel sure."

I shook my head. "Nay, I am of no birth, madam," I answered hurriedly. "I have no name. or at any rate no name that I can be proud of. Call me—call me, if it please you, Francis Carey."

"It is a good name," quoth Master Bertie, pausing with his knife suspended in the air. "A right good Protestant name!"

"But I have no claim to it," I rejoined, more and more hurt. "I have all to make. I am a new man. Yet do not fear!" I added quickly, as I saw what I took to be a cloud of doubt cross my lady's face. "I will follow you no less faithfully for that!"

"Yes," said the Duchess, a smile again transforming her open features, "I will answer for that, Master Carey. Deeds are better than names, and as for being a new man, what with Pagets and Cavendishes and Spencers, we have nought but new men nowadays. So, cheer up!" she continued kindly. "And we will poke no questions at you, though I doubt whether you do not pos-

sess more birth and breeding than you would have us think. And if, when we return to England, as I trust we may before we are old men and women, we can advance your cause, then let me have your secret. No one can say that Katherine Willoughby ever forgot her friend."

"Or forgave her enemy over quickly!" quoth her husband naïvely.

She rapped his knuckles with the back of her knife for that: and under cover of this small diversion I had time to regain my composure. But the matter left me sore at heart, and more than a little home-sick. And I sought leave to retire early.

"You are right!" said the Duchess, rising graciously. "To-night after being out in the air you will sleep soundly, and to-morrow you will be a new man," with a faint smile. "Believe me, I am not ungrateful, Master Francis, and I will diligently seek occasion to repay both your gallant defence of the other day and your future service." She gave me her hand to kiss, and I bent over it. "Now," she continued, "do homage to my baby, and then I shall consider that you are really one of us, and pledged to our cause."

I kissed the tiny fist held out to me, a soft pink thing looking like some dainty sea-shell.

Master Bertie cordially grasped my hand. And so under the oil-lamp in the neat cabin of that old Dutch boat, somewhere on the Waal between Gorcum and Nimeguen, we plighted our troth to one another, and in a sense I became one of them.

I went to my berth cheered and encouraged by their kindness. But the interview, satisfactory in other ways, had set up a degree of excitement in my brain, and it was long before I slept. When I did, I had a strange dream. I dreamt that I was sitting in the hall at Coton, and that Petronilla was standing on the daïs looking fixedly at me with gentle, sorrowful eyes. I wanted to go to her, but I could not move: every dreamer knows the sensation. I tried to call to her, to ask her what was the matter, and why she so looked at me. But I could utter no sound. And still she continued to fix me with the same sad reproachful eyes, in which I read a warning yet could not ask its meaning.

I struggled so hard that at last the spell was in a degree broken, and following the direction of her eyes I looked down at myself, and saw fastened to the breast of my doublet the knot of blue velvet which she had made for my sword-hilt, and which I had ever since carried in my

bosom. Moreover, I saw with a singular feeling of anger and sorrow that a mysterious hand which came over my shoulder was tugging hard at the ribbon in the attempt to remove it.

This gave me horrible concern, as may be imagined, yet at the moment I could not move nor do anything to prevent it. At last, making a stupendous effort, I awoke, my last dreaming experience being of the strange hand working at my breast. My first waking idea was the same, and under its influence I threw out my arms and cried aloud and sat up. "Ugh!" I exclaimed, trembling in the intensity of my relief, as I looked about and welcomed the now familiar surroundings. "It was only a dream. It was——"

I stopped abruptly, my eyes falling on a form lurking half-hidden in the doorway. I could see it but dimly by the light of a hanging lamp, which smoked and burned redly overhead. Yet I could see it. It was real, substantial, a waking figure; nevertheless, a faint touch of superstitious terror still clung to me. "Speak, please!" I murmured tremulously. "Who is it?"

"It is only I," answered a soft voice, and one well known to me—Mistress Anne's. "I came in to see how you were," she continued, advancing a little, "and whether you were sleeping. I am

afraid I awoke you. But you seemed," she added, "to be having such painful dreams that perhaps it was as well I did."

I was fumbling in my breast while she spoke, and certainly, whether in my sleep I had undone the fastenings, or had loosened them intentionally before I lay down (though I could not remember doing so), my doublet and shirt were open at the breast. The velvet knot was safe, however, in that tiny inner pocket beside the letter, and I breathed again. "I am very glad you did awake me!" I replied, looking gratefully at her. "I was having a horrible dream. It was good of you to think of me—and when you are not well yourself, too."

"I am better now," she murmured, her eyes, which glistened in the light, fixed steadily on me. "Much better. Now go to sleep again, and happier dreams to you. After to-night," she added pleasantly, "I shall no longer consider you as an invalid, nor intrude upon you."

And she was gone before I could reiterate my thanks. The door fell to, and I was alone, full of kindly feelings towards her, and of thankfulness that my horrible vision had no foundation. "Thank Heaven!" I murmured more than once, as I lay down; "it was only a dream."

Next day we reached Nimeguen, where we stayed a short time. Leaving that place in the afternoon, twenty-four hours' journeying, partly by river, partly, if I remember rightly, by canal, brought us to the neighbourhood of Arnheim on the Rhine. It was the 1st of March, but the opening month belied its reputation. There was a brightness, a softness in the air, and a consequent feeling as of spring which would better have befitted the middle of April. All day we remained on deck enjoying the kindliness of Nature, which was especially grateful to me, in whom the sap of health was beginning to spring again; and we were still there when one of those gorgeous sunsets which are peculiar to that country began to fling its hues across our path. We turned a jutting promontory, the boat began to fall off, and the captain came up, his errand to tell us that our journey was done.

We went eagerly forward at the news, and saw in a kind of bay, formed by a lake-like expansion of the river, a little island green and low, its banks trimly set with a single row of poplars. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile every way, and a channel one-fourth as wide separated it from the nearer shore of the river; to which a long narrow bridge of planks laid on trestles gave access. On

the outer side of the island, facing the river's course, stood a low white house, before which a sloping green terrace also bordered with poplars led down to a tiny pier. Behind and round the house were meadows as trim and neat as a child's toys, over which the eye roved with pleasure until it reached the landward side of the island, and there detected nestling among gardens a tiny village of half a dozen cottages. It was a scene of enchanting peace and quietude. As we slowly ploughed our way up to the landing-place, I saw the rabbits stand to gaze at us, and then with a flick of their heels dart off to their holes. I marked the cattle moving homeward in a string and heard the wildfowl rise in creek and pool with a whir of wings. I turned with a full heart to my neighbour. "Is it not lovely?" I cried with enthusiasm. "Is it not a peaceful place—a very Garden of Eden?"

I looked to see her fall into raptures such as women are commonly more prone to than men. But all women are not the same. Mistress Anne was looking, indeed, when I turned and surprised her, at the scene which had so moved me, but the expression of her face was sad and bitter and utterly melancholy. The weariness and fatigue I had often seen lurking in her eyes had invaded

all her features. She looked five years older; no longer a girl, but a grey-faced, careworn woman, whom the sight of this peaceful haven rather smote to the heart than filled with anticipations of safety and repose.

It was but for a moment I saw her so. Then she dashed her hand across her eyes—though I saw no tears in them—and with a pettish exclamation turned away. “Poor girl!” I thought. “She, too, is home-sick. No doubt this reminds her of some place at home, or of some person.” I thought this the more likely, since Master Bertie came from Lincolnshire, which he said had many of the features of this strange land. And it was conceivable enough that she should know Lincolnshire too, being related to his wife.

I soon forgot the matter in the excitement of landing. A few minutes of bustle and it was over. The boat put out again; and we four were left face to face with two strangers, an elderly man and a girl, who had come down to the pier to meet us. The former, stout, bluff, and red-faced, with a thick grey beard and a gold chain about his neck, had the air of a man of solid position. He greeted us warmly. His companion, who hung behind him, somewhat shyly, was as pretty a girl as one could find in a month. A second look

assured me, too, that she formed an excellent foil to the piquant brightness and keen vivacity, the dark hair and nervous features of Mistress Anne. For the Dutch girl was fair and plump and of perfect complexion. Her hair was very light, almost flaxen, indeed, and her eyes were softly and limpidly blue; grave, innocent, wondering eyes they were, I remember. I guessed rightly that she was the elderly man's daughter. Later I learned that she was his only child, and that her name was Dymphna.

He was a Master Lindstrom, a merchant of standing in Arnheim. He had visited England and spoke English fairly, and being under some obligations, it appeared, to the Duchess Katherine, was to be our host.

We all walked up the little avenue together, Master Lindstrom talking as we went to husband or wife, while his daughter and Mistress Anne came next, gazing each at each in silence, as women when they first meet will gaze, taking stock, I suppose, of a rival's weapons. I walked last, wondering why they had nothing to say to one another.

As we entered the house the mystery was explained. "She speaks no English," Mistress Anne said, with a touch of scorn.

"And we no Dutch," I answered smiling. "Here in Holland I am afraid that she will have somewhat the best of us. Try her with Spanish."

"Spanish! I know none."

"Well, I do, a little."

"What, you know Spanish?" Mistress Anne's tone of surprise amounted almost to incredulity, and it flattered me, boy that I was. I daresay it would have flattered many an older head than mine. "You know Spanish? Where did you learn it?" she continued sharply.

"At home."

"At home! Where is that?" And she eyed me still more closely. "Where is your home, Master Carey? You have never told me."

But I had said already more than I intended, and I shook my head. "I meant," I explained with a laugh, "that I learned it in a home I once had. Now my home is here. At any rate I have no other."

The Dutch girl standing patiently beside us looked first at one face and then at the other as we talked. We were all by this time in a long low parlour, warmed by a pretty closed fireplace covered with glazed tiles. On the shelves of a great armoire or dresser at one end of the room appeared a fine show of silver plate. At the

other end stood a tall linen-press of walnut-wood, handsomely carved; and even the gratings of the windows and the handles of the doors were of hammered iron work. There were no rushes on the floor, which was made of small pieces of wood delicately jointed and set together and brightly polished. But everything in sight was clean and trim to a degree which would have shamed our great house at Coton, where the rushes sometimes lay for a week unchanged. With each glance round I felt a livelier satisfaction. I turned to Mistress Dymphna.

“Señorita!” I said, mustering my noblest accent. “Beso los pies de Usted! Habla Usted Castellano?”

Mistress Anne stared. The effect on the girl whom I addressed was greater than I had looked for, but it was of a different kind. She started and drew back, an expression of offended dignity and of something like anger ruffling her placid face. Did she not understand? Yes, for after a moment’s hesitation, and with a heightened colour, she answered, “Si, Señor.”

Her constrained manner was not encouraging, but I was going on to open a conversation if I could—for it looked little grateful of us to stand there speechless and staring—when Mistress Anne

interposed. "What did you say to her? What was it?" she asked eagerly.

"I asked her if she spoke Spanish. That was all," I replied, my eyes on Dymphna's face, which still betrayed trouble of some kind, "except that I paid her the usual formal compliment, you know. But what is she saying to her father?"

It was like the Christmas game of cross questions, indeed. The girl and I had spoken in Spanish. I turned what we had said into English for Mistress Anne, the while Mistress Dymphna translated it into Dutch for her father; an anxious look on her face which needed no translation.

"What is it?" Master Bertie asked, observing that something was wrong.

"It is nothing—nothing!" replied the merchant apologetically, though as he spoke his eyes dwelt on me curiously. "It is only that I did not know that you had a Spaniard in your company."

"A Spaniard?" Master Bertie answered. "We have none. This," pointing to me, "is our very good friend and faithful follower, Master Carey—an Englishman."

"To whom," added the Duchess, smiling gravely, "I am greatly indebted."

I hurriedly explained the mistake, and brought at once a smile of relief to the Mynheer's face.

“Ah! pardon me, I beseech you,” he said. “My daughter was in error.” And he added something in Dutch, which caused Mistress Dymphna to blush. “You know,” he continued—“I may speak freely to you, since our enemies are in the main the same—you know that our Spanish rulers are not very popular with us, and grow less popular every day, especially with those who are of the reformed faith. We have learned some of us to speak their language, but we love them none the better for that.”

“I can sympathise with you to the full,” cried the Duchess impulsively. “God grant that our country may never be in the same plight; though it looks as if this Spanish marriage were like to put us in it. It is Spain! Spain! Spain! and nothing else nowadays!”

“Nevertheless, the Emperor is a great and puissant monarch,” rejoined the Arnheimer thoughtfully; “and could he rule us himself, we might do well. But his dominions are so large, he knows little of us. And worse, he is dying, or as good as dying. He can scarcely sit his horse, and rumour says that before the year is out he will resign the throne. Then we hear little good of his successor, your queen’s husband, and look to

hear less. I fear that there is a dark time before us, and God only knows the issue."

"And alone will rule it," Master Bertie rejoined piously.

This saying was in a way the key-note to the life we found our host living on his island estate. Peace, but peace with constant fear for an assailant, and religion for a supporter. Several times a week Master Lindstrom would go to Arnheim to superintend his business, and always after his return he would shake his head, and speak gravely, and Dymphna would lose her colour for an hour or two. Things were going badly. The reformers were being more and more hardly dealt with. The Spaniards were growing more despotic. That was his constant report. And then I would see him, as he walked with us in orchard or garden, or sat beside the stove, cast wistful glances at the comfort and plenty round him. I knew that he was asking himself how long they would last. If they escaped the clutches of a tyrannical government, would they be safe, in the times that were coming, from the violence of an ill-paid soldiery? The answer was doubtful, or rather it was too certain.

I sometimes wondered how he could patiently foresee such possibilities, and take no steps, what-

ever the risk, to prevent them. At first I thought his patience sprang from the Dutch character. Later I traced its deeper roots to a simplicity of faith and a deep religious feeling, which either did not at that time exist in England, or existed only among people with whom I had never come into contact. Here they seemed common enough and real enough. These folks' faith sustained them. It was a part of their lives; a bulwark against the fear that otherwise would have overwhelmed them. And to an extent, too, which then surprised me. I found, as time went on, that the Duchess and Master Bertie shared this enthusiasm, although with them it took a less obtrusive form.

I was led at the time to think a good deal about this; and whereas before I had taken but a lukewarm interest in religious questions, and while clinging instinctively to the teaching of my childhood had conformed with a light heart rather than annoy my uncle, I came to think somewhat differently now. And so I have continued to think since, though I have never become a bigot; a fact I owe, perhaps, to Mistress Dymphna, in whose tender heart there was room for charity as well as faith. For she was my teacher.

Of necessity, since no other of our party could communicate with her, I became the Dutch girl's

companion. I would often, of an evening, join her on a wooden bench which stood under an elm on a little spit of grass looking towards the city, and at some distance from the house. Here when the weather was warm she would watch for her father's return; and here one day while talking with her I had the opportunity of witnessing a sight unknown in England, but which year by year was to become more common in the Netherlands, more heavily fraught with menace in Netherland eyes.

We happened at the time in question to be very deeply engaged in watching the upper end of the reach, where we expected each moment to see Master Lindstrom's boat come round the point; and we saw nothing of a boat coming the other way, until the flapping of its sails, as it tacked, drew our eyes towards it. Even then in the boat itself I saw nothing strange, but in its passengers I did. They were swarthy, moustachioed men, who in the hundred poses they assumed as they lounged on deck or leaned over the side never lost a peculiar air of bravado. As they drew nearer to us the sound of their loud voices, their oaths and laughter reached us plainly, and seemed to jar on the evening stillness. Their bold fierce eyes raking the banks unceasingly

reached us at last. The girl by my side uttered a cry of alarm, and rose as if to retreat. But she sat down again, for behind us was an open stretch of turf, and to escape unseen was impossible. Already a score of eyes had marked her beauty, and as the boat drew abreast of us I had to listen to the ribald jests and laughter of those on board. My ears tingled and my cheeks burned. But I could do nothing. I could only glare at them, and grind my teeth.

“Who are they?” I muttered. “The cowardly knaves!”

“Oh, hush! hush!” the girl pleaded. She had retreated behind me.

And indeed I need not have put my question, for though I had never seen the Spanish soldiery I had heard enough of them to recognise them now. In the year 1555 their reputation was at its height. Their fathers had overcome the Moors after a contest of centuries, and they themselves had overrun Italy and lowered the pride of France. As a result they had many military virtues and all the military vices. Proud, bloodthirsty, and licentious everywhere, it may be imagined that in the subject Netherlands, with their pay always in arrear, they were, indeed, people to be feared. It

was seldom that even their commanders dared to check their excesses.

Yet when the first flush of my anger subsided I looked after them, odd as it may seem, with mingled feelings. With all their faults they were few against many, a conquering race in a foreign land. They could boast of blood and descent. They were proud to call themselves the soldiers and gentlemen of Europe. I was against them, yet I admired them with a boy's admiration for the strong and reckless.

Of course I said nothing of this to my companion. Indeed, when she spoke to me I did not hear her. My thoughts had flown far from the burgher's daughter sitting by me, and were with my grandmother's people. I saw, in imagination, the uplands of Old Castile, as I had often heard them described, hot in summer and bleak in winter. I pictured the dark frowning walls of Toledo, with its hundred Moorish trophies, the castles that crowned the hills round, the grey olive groves, and the box-clad slopes. I saw Palencia, where my grandmother, Petronilla de Vargas, was born; Palencia dry and brown and sun-baked, lying squat and low on its plain, the eaves of its cathedral a man's height from the ground. All this I saw. I suppose the Spanish

blood in me awoke and asserted itself at sight of those other Spaniards. And then—then I forgot it all as I heard behind me an alien voice, and I turned and found Dymphna had stolen from me and was talking to a stranger.

CHAPTER IX.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

HE was a young man, and a Dutchman, but not a Dutchman of the stout burly type which I had most commonly seen in the country. He had, it is true, the usual fair hair and blue eyes, and he was rather short than tall; but his figure was thin and meagre, and he had a pointed nose and chin, and a scanty fair beard. I took him to be near-sighted; at a second glance I saw that he was angry. He was talking fast to Dymphna—of course in Dutch—and my first impulse, in face of his excited gestures and queer appearance, was to laugh. But I had a notion what his relationship to the girl was, and I smothered this, and instead asked, as soon as I could get a word in, whether I should leave them.

“Oh, no!” Dymphna answered, blushing

slightly, and turning to me with a troubled glance. I believe she had clean forgotten my presence. "This is Master Jan Van Tree, a good friend of ours. And this," she continued, still in Spanish, but speaking to him, "is Master Carey, one of my father's guests."

We bowed, he formally, for he had not recovered his temper, and I—I daresay I still had my Spanish ancestors in my head—with condescension. We disliked one another at sight, I think. I dubbed him a mean little fellow, a trader, a pedlar; and, however he classed me, it was not favourably. So it was no particular desire to please him which led me to say with outward solicitude, "I fear you are annoyed at something, Master Van Tree?"

"I am!" he said bluntly, meeting me half way.

"And am I to know the cause?" I asked, "or is it a secret?"

"It is no secret!" he retorted. "Mistress Lindstrom should have been more careful. She should not have exposed herself to the chance of being seen by those miserable foreigners."

"The foreigners—in the boat?" I said drily.

"Yes, of course—in the boat," he answered. He was obliged to say that, but he glared at me

across her as he spoke. We had turned and were walking back to the house, the poplars casting long shadows across our path.

"They were rude," I observed carelessly, my chin very high. "But there is no particular harm done that I can see, Master Van Tree."

"Perhaps not, as far as you can see," he retorted in great excitement. "But perhaps also you are not very far-sighted, sir. You may not see it now, yet harm will follow."

"Possibly," I said, and I was going to follow up this seemingly candid admission by something very boorish, when Mistress Dymphna struck in nervously.

"My father is anxious," she said in haste, speaking to me, "that I should have as little to do with our Spanish governors as possible, Master Carey. It always vexes him to hear that I have fallen in their way, and that is why my friend feels annoyed. It was not, of course, your fault, since you did not know of this. It was I," she continued hurriedly, "who should not have ventured to the elm-tree without seeing that the coast was clear."

I knew that she was timidly trying, her colour coming and going, to catch my eye; to appease me as the greater stranger, and to keep the peace

between her ill-matched companions, who stalked along eyeing one another as a wolf-hound and a badger-dog might regard each other across a choice bone. But the young Dutchman's sudden appearance had put me out. I was not in love with her, yet I liked to talk to her, and I grudged her to him, he seemed so mean a fellow. And so—churl that I was—in answer to her speech I let drop some sneer about the great fear of the Spaniards which seemed to prevail in these parts.

“*You* are not afraid of them, then, I suppose?” Van Tree said, with a smile.

“No, I am not,” I answered, my lip curling.

“Ah!” with much meaning. “Perhaps you do not know them very well yet.”

“Perhaps not,” I replied. “Still, my grandmother was a Spaniard.”

“So I should have thought,” he retorted swiftly.

So swiftly, indeed, that I felt the words as I should have felt a blow. “What do you mean?” I blurted out, halting before him, with my cheek crimson. In vain were all Dymphna's appealing glances, all her signs of distress. “I will have you explain, Master Van Tree, what you mean by that?” I repeated fiercely.

“I mean what I said,” he answered, confronting me stubbornly, and shaking off Dymphna's

hand. His blue eyes twinkled with rage, his thin beard bristled; he was the colour of a turkey-cock's comb. At home we should have thought him a comical little figure; but he did not seem so absurd here. For one thing, he looked spiteful enough for anything; and for another, though I topped him by a head and shoulders, I could not flatter myself that he was afraid of me. On the contrary, I felt that in the presence of his mistress, small and short-sighted as he was, he would have faced a lion without winking.

His courage was not to be put to the proof, however. I was still glaring at him, seeking some retort which should provoke him beyond endurance, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and I turned to find that Master Bertie and the Duchess had joined us.

"So here are the truants," the former said pleasantly, speaking in English; and showing no consciousness whatever of the crisis in the middle of which he had come up, though he must have discerned in our defiant attitudes, and in Dymphna's troubled face, that something was wrong. "You know who this is, Master Francis," he continued heartily. "Or have you not been introduced to Master Van Tree, the betrothed of our host's daughter?"

"Mistress Dymphna has done me that honour," I said stiffly, recovering myself in appearance, while at heart sore and angry with everybody. "But I fear the Dutch gentleman has not thanked her for the introduction, since he learned that my grandmother was Spanish."

"*Your* grandmother, do you mean?" the Duchess cried, much astonished.

"Yes, madam."

"Well, to be sure!" she exclaimed, lifting up her hands, and appealing whimsically to the others. "This boy is full of starts and surprises. You never know what he will produce next. The other day it was a warrant! To-day it is a grandmother, and a temper!"

I could not be angry with her; and perhaps I was not sorry now that my quarrel with the young Dutchman had stopped where it had. I affected as well as I could to join in the laugh at my expense, and took advantage of the arrival of our host—who at this moment came up the slope from the landing-place, his hands outstretched and a smile of greeting on his kindly face—to slip away unnoticed, and make amends to my humour by switching off the heads of the withes by the river.

But naturally the scene left a degree of ill-

feeling behind it; and for the first time, during the two months we had spent under Master Lindstrom's roof, the party who sat down to supper were under some constraint. I felt that the young Dutchman had had the best of the bout in the garden; and I talked loudly and foolishly in the boyish attempt to assert myself, and to set myself right at least in my own estimation. Master Van Tree meanwhile sat silent, eyeing me from time to time in no friendly fashion. Dymphna seemed nervous and frightened, and the Duchess and her husband exchanged troubled glances. Only our host and Mistress Anne, who was in particularly good spirits, were unaffected by the prevailing chill.

Mistress Anne, indeed, in her ignorance, made matters worse. She had begun to pick up some Dutch, and was fond of airing her knowledge and practising fresh sentences at meal-times. By some ill-luck she contrived this evening—particularly after I had fallen, for want of contradiction, into comparative silence—to frame her sentences so as to cause as much embarrassment as possible to all of us.

“Where did you walk with Dymphna this morning?” was the question she put to me. “You are fond of the water; Englishmen are fond of

the water," she said to Dymphna. "Dymphna is tall; Master Francis is tall. I sit by you to-night; the Dutch lady sat by you last night," to our host; and so she went on, with prattle which seemed to amuse him exceedingly—he was never tired of correcting her mistakes—but which put the rest of us out of countenance; bringing the tears to poor Dymphna's eyes—she did not know where to look—and making her lover glower at me as though he would eat me.

It was in vain that the Duchess made spasmodic rushes into the conversation, and in the intervals nodded and frowned at the delinquent. Mistress Anne in her innocence saw nothing. She went on until Van Tree could stand it no longer, and with a half-smothered threat, which was perfectly intelligible to me, rose roughly from the table, and went to the door as if to look out at the night.

"What is the matter?" Mistress Anne said wonderingly in English. Her eyes seemed at length to be opened to the fact that something was amiss with us.

Before I could answer, the Duchess, who had risen, came behind her.

"You little fool!" she whispered fiercely, "if fool you are. You deserve to be whipped!"

"Why, what have I done?" the girl murmured, really frightened now, and appealing to me.

"Done!" the Duchess whispered; and I think she pinched her, for my neighbour winced. "More harm than you guess, you minx! And for you, Master Francis, a word with you. Come with me to my room, please."

I went with her, half-minded to be angry, and half-inclined to feel ashamed of my doings. She did not give me time, however, to consider which attitude I should take up, for the moment the door of her room was closed behind us, she turned upon me, the colour high in her cheeks.

"Now, sir," she said in a tone of ringing contempt; "do you really think that that girl is in love with you?"

"What girl?" I asked sheepishly. The unexpected question and her tone put me out of countenance.

"What girl? What girl?" she replied impatiently. "Don't play with me, boy! You know whom I mean. Dymphna Lindstrom!"

"Oh, I thought you meant Mistress Anne," I said, somewhat impertinently.

Her face fell in an extraordinary fashion, as if the suggestion were not pleasant to her. But she answered on the instant——

“Well! The vanity of the lad! Do you think all the girls are in love with you? Because you have been sitting with a pretty face on each side of you, do you think you have only to throw the handkerchief this way or that? If you do, open your eyes, and you will find that it is not so. My kinswoman can take care of herself, so we will leave her out of the dicussion, please. And for this pink-and-white Dutch girl,” my lady continued viciously, “let me tell you that she thinks more of Van Tree’s little finger than of your whole body.”

I shrugged my shoulders, but still I was mortified. A young man may not be in love with a girl, yet it displeases him to hear that she is indifferent to him.

The Duchess noticed the movement.

“Don’t do that,” she cried in impatient scorn. “You do not see much in Master Van Tree, perhaps? I thought not. Therefore you think a girl must be of the same mind as yourself. Well,” with a fierce little nod, “you will learn some day that it is not so, that women are not quite what men think them; and particularly, Master Francis, that six feet of manhood, and a pretty face on top of it, do not always have their way. But there, I did not bring you here to tell you that.

I want to know whether you are aware what you are doing?"

I muttered something to the effect that I did not know I was doing any harm.

"You do not call it harm, then," the Duchess retorted with energy, "to endanger the safety of every one of us? Cannot you see that if you insult and offend this young man—which you are doing out of pure wanton mischief, for you are not in love with the girl—he may ruin us?"

"Ruin us?" I repeated incredulously.

"Yes, ruin us!" she cried. "Here we are, living more or less in hiding through the kindness of Master Lindstrom—living in peace and quietness. But do you suppose that inquiries are not being made for us? Why, I would bet a dozen gold angels that Master Clarence is in the Netherlands at this moment tracking us."

I was startled by this idea, and she saw I was.

"We can trust Master Lindstrom were it only for his own sake," she continued more quietly, satisfied with the effect she had produced. "And this young man, who is the son of one of the principal men of Arnheim, is also disposed to look kindly on us, as I fancy it is his nature to look. But if you make mischief between Dymphna and him, I will answer for nothing!"

"I have not," I said.

"Then do not," she replied sharply. "Look to it for the future. And more, do not let him fancy it possible. Jealousy is as easily awakened as it is hardly put to sleep. A word from this young man to the Spanish authorities, and we should be hauled back to England in a trice, if worse did not befall us here. Now, you will be careful, my friend?"

"I will," I said, conscience-stricken and utterly cowed.

"That is better," she replied, smiling. "I think you will. Now go."

I went down again with some food for thought and with some good intentions, too. But I was to find—the discovery is made by many—that good resolutions commonly come too late. When I went downstairs I found my host and Master Bertie alone in the parlour. The girls had disappeared, so had Van Tree, and I saw at once that something had happened. Master Bertie was standing gazing at the stove very thoughtfully, and the Dutchman was walking up and down the room with an almost comical expression of annoyance and trouble on his pleasant face.

"Where are the young ladies?" I asked.

"Upstairs," said Master Bertie, not looking at me.

"And—and Van Tree?" I asked mechanically. Somehow I anticipated the answer.

"Gone!" said the Englishman curtly.

"Ay, gone, the foolish lad!" the Dutchman struck in, tugging at his beard. "What has come to him, I wonder? He is not wont to show temper. I have never known him and Dymphna have a cross word before. What has come to the lad, I say, to go off in a passion at this time of night? And no one to know whither he has gone, or when he will come back again!"

He seemed, as he spoke, hardly conscious of my presence. Certainly he had no suspicion of me; but Master Bertie turned and looked at me, and I hung my head, and very shortly afterwards I slunk out. The thought of what I might have brought upon us all by my petulance and vanity made me creep up to bed nervous and fearful of the morrow, listening to every noise without, and praying inwardly that my alarm might not be justified.

When the morrow came I went downstairs as anxious to see Van Tree in the flesh as I had been yesterday disappointed by his appearance. But no Van Tree was there to be seen. Nothing

had been heard of him. Dymphna moved restlessly about the house, her cheeks pale, her eyes downcast; and if I had ever flattered myself that I was anything to the girl, I was undeceived now. The Duchess shot angry glances at me from time to time. Master Bertie kept looking anxiously at the door. Every one seemed to fear and to expect something. But none of them feared and expected it as I did.

"He must have gone home; he must have gone to Arnheim," our host said, trying to hide his vexation. "He will be back in a day or two. Young men will be young men."

But I found that the Duchess did not share the belief that Van Tree had gone home; for in the course of the morning she took occasion, when we were alone, to charge me to be careful not to come into collision with him.

"How can I, now he has gone?" I said meekly, feeling I was in disgrace.

"He has not gone far," the Duchess replied, meaningly. "Depend upon it, he will not go far out of sight unless there is more harm done than I think, or he is very different from English lovers. So if you come across him I pray you to keep clear of him, Master Francis."

I nodded assent.

But I was to discover how light are resolutions with fate in the other scale. It was some hours after this, towards two o'clock indeed, that Mistress Anne came to me, looking flurried and vexed.

"Have you seen Dymphna?" she asked abruptly.

"No," I answered. "Why?"

"Because she is not in the house," the girl rejoined, speaking quickly, "nor in the garden; and the last time I saw her she was crossing the island towards the foot-bridge. I think she has gone that way to be on the look-out—you can guess for whom," with a smile. "But I am fearful lest she should meet some one else, Master Francis; she is wearing her gold chain, and one of the maids says that she saw two soldiers of the Spanish garrison on the road near the end of the foot-bridge this morning. That is the way by land to Arnheim, you know."

"That is bad," I said. "What is to be done?"

"You must go and look for her," Anne suggested anxiously. "She should not be alone."

"Let her father go, or Master Bertie," I replied.

"Her father has gone down the river — to

Arnheim, I expect; and Master Bertie is fishing in a boat somewhere. It will take time to find him. Why cannot you go? If she has crossed the foot-bridge she will not be far away."

She seemed so much exercised about the Dutch girl's safety that she infected me with her fears, and I let myself be persuaded. After all, there might be danger, and I did not see what else was to be done. Indeed, Mistress Anne was so pressing that she did not leave me until she had seen me clear of the orchard, and half-way across the meadows towards the foot-bridge.

"Mind you bring her back," she cried after me. "Do not let her come alone!" and those were her last words.

After she was gone I did think for a moment that it was a pity I had not asked her to come with me. But the thought occurred too late, and I strode on towards the head of the bridge, resolving that, as soon as I sighted Dymphna, I would keep away from her and content myself with watching over her from a distance. As I passed by the little cluster of cottages on the landward side of the island, I glanced sharply about me, for I thought it not unlikely that Van Tree might be lurking in the neighbourhood. But I saw nothing either of her or him. All was

quiet, the air full of spring sunshine and warmth and hope and the blossoms of fruit-trees; and with an indefinable pleasure, a feeling of escape from control and restraint, I crossed the long foot-bridge, and set foot, almost for the first time since our arrival—for at Master Lindstrom's desire we kept very close—on the river bank.

To the right a fair road or causeway along the waterside led to Arnheim. At the point where I stood, this road on its way from the city took a turn at right angles, running straight away from the river to avoid a wide tract of swamp and mere which lay on my left—a quaking marsh many miles round, overgrown with tall rushes and sedges, which formed the head of the bay in which our island lay. I looked up the long straight road to Arnheim, and saw only a group of travellers moving slowly along it, their backs towards me. The road before me was bare of passengers. Where, then, was Dymphna if she had crossed the bridge? In the last resort, seeing her nowhere else, I scanned the green expanse of rushes and willows, which stretched, with intervals of open water, as far as the eye could reach on my left. It was all rustling and shimmering in the light breeze, but my eye picked out one or two raised dykes which penetrated it here and there, and

served at once as pathways to islets in the mere, and as breastworks against further encroachments of the river. Presently, on one of these, of which the course was fairly defined by a line of willows, I made out the flutter of a woman's hood. And I remembered that a day or two before Dymphna had expressed a wish to go to the marsh for some herb which grew there.

"Right!" I said, seating myself with much satisfaction on the last post of the bridge. "She is safe enough there. And I will go no nearer. It is only on the road she is likely to be in danger from our Spanish gallants!"

My eyes, released from duty, wandered idly over the landscape for awhile, but presently returned to the dyke across the mere. I could not now see Dymphna. The willows hid her, and I waited for her to reappear. She did not, but some one else did; for by-and-by, on the same path and crossing an interval between the willows, there came into sight a man's form.

"Ho! ho!" I said, following it with my eyes. "So I may go home! Master Van Tree is on the track. And now I hope they will make it up!" I added pettishly.

Another second and I started to my feet with a low cry. The sunlight had caught a part of

the man's dress, a shining something which flashed back a point of intense light. The something I guessed at once was a corselet; it could be nothing else, and it needed scarce another thought to apprise me that Dymphna's follower was not Van Tree at all, but a Spanish soldier!

I lost no time; yet it took me a minute—a minute of trembling haste and anxiety—to discover the path from the causeway on to the dyke. When once I had stumbled on to the latter I found I had lost sight of both figures; but I ran along at the top of my speed, calculating that the two, who could not be far apart, the man being the nearer to me, were about a quarter of a mile or rather more from the road. I had gone one-half of this distance, perhaps, when a shrill scream in front caused me to redouble my efforts. I expected to find the girl in the ruffian's hands, and clutched my cudgel—for, alas! I had left my sword at home—more tightly in my grasp. It may be imagined that it was an immense relief to me when turning an angle in the dyke I saw her running towards me. Her face, still white with fear, and her hair streaming loosely behind her, told how narrow had been her escape—if escape it could be called. For about ten feet behind her, the hood he had plucked off still in his grasp, came

Master Spaniard, hot-foot and panting, but gaining on her now with every stride.

He was a tall fellow, gaily dressed, swarthy, moustachioed, and fierce-eyed. His corselet and sword-belt shone and jingled as he ran and swore; but he had dropped his feathered bonnet in the slight struggle which had evidently taken place when she got by him; and it lay a black spot in the middle of the grassy avenue behind him. The sun—it was about three hours after noon—was at my back, and shining directly into his eyes, and I marked this as I raised my cudgel and jumped aside to let the girl pass; for she in her blind fear would have run against me.

It was almost the same with him. He did not see me until I was within a few paces of him, and even then I think he noticed my presence merely as that of an unwelcome spectator. He fancied I should step aside; and he cursed me, calling me a Dutch dog for getting in his way.

The next moment—he had not drawn his sword nor made any attempt to draw it—we came together violently, and I had my hand on his throat. We swayed as we whirled round one another in the first shock of the collision. An oath of astonishment escaped him—astonishment,

I think, at my hardihood. He tried, his eyes glaring into mine, and his hot breath on my cheek, to get at his dagger. But it was too late. I brought down my staff with all the strength of an arm nerved at the moment by rage and despair upon his bare head.

He went down like a stone, and the blood bubbled from his lips. I stood over him watching him. He stretched himself out and turned with a convulsive movement on his face. His hands clawed the grass. His leg moved once, twice, a third time faintly. Then he lay still.

There was a lark singing just over my head, and its clear notes seemed, during the long minute which I spent bending over him under the spell of an awful fascination, to be the only sounds in Nature. I looked so long at him in that dreadful stillness and absorption, I dared not at last look up lest I should see I knew not what. Yet when a touch fell on my arm I did not start.

"You have killed him," the girl whispered, shuddering, and covering her eyes.

"Yes, I have killed him," I answered mechanically.

I could not take my eyes off him. It was not as if I had done this thing after a long conflict, or in a *mêlée* with others fighting round me, or

on the battle-field. I should have felt no horror then such as I felt now, standing over him in the sunshine with the lark's song in my ears. It had happened so quickly, and the waste about us was so still; and I had never killed a man before, nor seen a man die.

"Oh, come away!" Dymphna wailed suddenly. "Come away!"

I turned then, and the sight of the girl's wan face and strained eyes recalled me in some degree to myself. I saw that she was ill; and hastily I gave her my arm, and partly carried, partly supported, her back to the road. The way seemed long and I looked behind me often. But we reached the causeway at last, and there in the open I felt some relief. Yet even then, stopping to cast a backward glance at the marsh, I shuddered anew, espying a bright white spark gleaming amid the green of the rushes. It was the dead man's corselet. But if it had been his eye I could scarcely have shrunk from it in greater dread.

It may be imagined that we were not long in crossing the island. Naturally I was full of what had happened. I never gave a thought by the way to Van Tree's jealousy, or the incidents of his short visit, and had even forgotten his existence

when we reached the porch. But entering rapidly, with Dymphna clinging to my arm, I received a rude reminder. The young Dutchman rose suddenly from the seat on one side of the door, and at the same moment the Duchess rose from the bench on the other. I did not understand in the first instant of surprise what was the matter, though I let Dymphna's hand fall from my arm. The dark scowling face of the one, however, and the anger and chagrin written on the features of the other, as they both glared at us, brought all back to me in a flash. But it was too late. Before I could utter a word, or attempt explanation, the girl's lover pushed by me with a fierce gesture and fiercer cry, and disappeared round a corner of the house.

"Was ever such folly!" the Duchess cried, stamping her foot, and standing before us, her face crimson. "Or such fools! You idiot! You——"

"Hush, madam," I said sternly—had I really grown older in doing the deed?—"something has happened."

And Dymphna, with a low cry of "The Spaniard! the Spaniard!" tottered up to her and fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER X.

THE FACE IN THE PORCH.

"THIS is a serious matter," said Master Bertie thoughtfully, as we sat in conclave an hour later round the table in the parlour. Mistress Anne was attending to Dymphna upstairs, and Van Tree had not returned again; so that we had been unable to tell him of the morning's adventure. But the rest of us were there. "It considerably adds to the danger of our position," Bertie continued, moving uneasily on his chair.

"Of course it does," his wife said promptly. "But Master Lindstrom here can best judge of that, and of what course it will be safest to take."

"It depends," our host answered slowly, "upon whether the dead man be discovered before night. You see, if the body be not found——"

"Well?" my lady said impatiently, as he paused.

"Then we must some of us go after dark and bury the man," he decided. "And perhaps, though he will be missed at the next roll-call in the city, his death may not be proved, or traced to this neighbourhood. In that case the storm will blow over, and things be no worse than before."

"I fear there is no likelihood of that," I said, "for I am told he had a companion. One of the maids noticed the two lurking about the end of the bridge more than once this morning."

Our host's face fell.

"That is bad," he said, looking at me in evident consternation. "Who told you?"

"Mistress Anne. And one of the maids told her. It was that which led me to follow your daughter."

The old man got up for about the fortieth time, and shook my hand, while the tears stood in his eyes and his lip trembled. "Heaven bless you, Master Carey!" he said. "But for you, my girl might not have escaped."

He could not finish. His emotion choked him, and he sat down again. The event of the morning—his daughter's danger, and my share in averting it—had touched him as nothing else could have touched him. I met the Duchess's eyes,

and they, too, were soft and shining, wearing an expression very different from that which had greeted me on my return with Dymphna.

"Ah, well! she is safe," Master Lindstrom resumed, when he had regained his composure. "Thanks to Heaven and your friend, madam! Small matter now if house and lands go!"

"Still, let us hope they will not," Master Bertie said. "Do you think these miscreants were watching the island on our account? That some information had been given as to our presence, and they were sent to learn what they could?"

"No, no!" the Dutchman answered confidently. "It was the sight of the girl and her gewgaws yesterday brought them, the villains! There is nothing safe from them and nothing sacred to them. They saw her as they passed up in the boat, you remember."

"But then, supposing the worst to come to the worst?"

"We must escape across the frontier to Wesel, in the Duchy of Cleves," Lindstorm replied in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he had long considered and settled the point. "The distance is not great, and in Wesel we may find shelter, at any rate, for a time. Even there, if pressure be brought

to bear upon the government to give us up, I would not trust it. Yet for a time it may do."

"And you would leave all this?" the Duchess said in wonder, her eyes travelling round the room, so clean and warm and comfortable, and settling at length upon the great armoire of plate which happened to be opposite to her. "You would leave all this at a moment's notice?"

"Yes, madam, all we could not carry with us," he answered simply. "Honour and life, these come first. And I thank Heaven that I live here within reach of a foreign soil, and not in the interior, where escape would be hopeless."

"But if the true facts were known," the Duchess urged, "would you still be in danger? Would not the magistrates protect you? The Schout and Schepen, as you call them? They are Dutchmen."

"Against a Spanish governor and a Spanish garrison?" he replied, with bitter emphasis. "Ay, they would protect me—as one sheep protects another against the wolves. No! I dare not risk it. Were I in prison, what would become of Dymphna?"

"Master Van Tree?"

"He has the will to shelter her, no doubt. And his father has influence; but such as mine, a

broken reed to trust to. Then Dymphna is not all. Once in prison, whatever the charge, there would be questioning about religion; perhaps," with a faint smile, "questioning about my guests."

"I suppose you know best," said the Duchess with a sigh. "But I hope the worst will not come to the worst."

"Amen to that!" he answered, quite cheerfully.

Indeed, it was strange that we seemed to feel more sorrow at the prospect of leaving this haven of a few weeks, than our host of quitting the home of a lifetime. But the necessity had come upon us suddenly, while he had contemplated it for years. So much fear and humiliation had mingled with his enjoyment of his choicest possessions that this long-expected moment brought with it, I fancy, a feeling akin to relief.

For myself, I had a present trouble which outweighed any calamity of to-morrow. Perforce, since I alone knew the spot where the man lay, I must be one of the burying party. My nerves had not recovered from the shock which the sight of the Spaniard lying dead at my feet had dealt them so short a time before, and I shrank with natural repulsion from the task before me. Yet

there was no escaping it, no chance of escaping it, I saw.

All the more, through the silent meal to which we four sat down together, neither the girls nor Van Tree appearing, were my thoughts taken up with the business which was to follow. I heard our host, who was to go with me, explaining that there was a waterway right up to the dyke, and that we would go by boat; and heard him with apathy. What matter how we went, if such were the object of our journey? I wondered how the man's face would look when we came to turn him over, and pictured it in all ghastliest shapes. I wondered whether I should ever forget the strange spasmodic twitching of his leg, the gurgle—half oath, half cry—which had come with the blood from his throat. When Lindstrom said the moon was up and bade me come with him to the boat, I went mechanically. No one seemed to suspect me of fear. I suppose they thought that as I had not feared to kill him, I should not fear him dead. And in the general silence and moodiness I escaped notice.

"It is a good night for the purpose," the Dutchman said, looking about when we were outside. "It is light enough for us, yet not so light that we run much risk of being seen."

I assented, shivering. The moon was almost at the full, and the weather was dry; but scud after scud of thin clouds sweeping across the breezy sky obscured the light from time to time, and left nothing certain. We loosed the smallest boat in silence, and, getting in, pulled gently round the lower end of the island, making for the fringe of rushes which marked the line of division between river and fen. We could hear the frogs croaking in the marsh, and the water lapping the banks, and gurgling among the tree-roots, and making a hundred strange noises to which daylight ears are deaf. Yet as long as I was in the open water I felt bold enough. I kept my tremors for the moment when we should brush through the rustling belt of reeds, and the willows should whisper above our heads, and the rank vegetation, the mysterious darkness of the mere should shut us in.

For a time I was to be spared this. Master Lindstrom suddenly stopped rowing. "We have forgotten to bring a stone, lad," he said in a low voice.

"A stone?" I answered, turning. I was pulling the stroke oar, and my back was towards him. "Do we want a stone?"

"To sink the body," he replied. "We can-

not bury it in the marsh, and if we could it were trouble thrown away. We must have a stone."

"What is to be done?" I asked, leaning on my oar and shivering, as much in impatience as nervousness. "Must we go back?"

"No, we are not far from the causeway now," he answered, with Dutch coolness. "There are some big stones, I fancy, by the end of the bridge. If not, there are some lying among the cottages just across the bridge. Your eyes are younger than mine, so you had better go. I will pull on, and land you."

I assented, and, the boat's course being changed a point or two, three minutes' rowing laid her bows on the mud, some fifty yards from the landward end of the bridge, and just in the shadow of the causeway. I sprang ashore and clambered up. "Hist!" he cried, warning me as I was about to start on my errand. "Go about it quietly, Master Francis. The people will probably be in bed. But be secret."

I nodded and moved off, as warily as he could desire. I spent a minute or two peering about the causeway, but I found nothing that would serve our purpose. There was no course left then but to cross the planks, and seek what I

wanted in the hamlet. Remembering how the timbers had creaked and clattered when I went over them in the daylight, I stole across on tiptoe. I fancied I had seen a pile of stones near one of the posts at that end, but I could not find them now, and after groping about awhile—for this part was in darkness—I crept cautiously past the first hovel, peering to right and left as I went. I did not like to confess to myself that I was afraid to be alone in the dark, but that was nearly the truth. I was feverishly anxious to find what I wanted and return to my companion.

Suddenly I paused and held my breath. A slight sound had reached my ears, nervously ready to catch the slightest. I paused and listened. Yes, there it was again; a whispering of cautious voices close by me, within a few feet of me, as it seemed. I could see no one, but a moment's thought told me that the speakers were hidden by the farther corner of the cottage abreast of which I stood. The sound of human voices, the assurance of living companionship, steadied my nerves, and to some extent rid me of my folly. I took a step to one side, so as to be more completely in the shadow cast by the reed-thatched eaves, and then softly ad-

vanced until I commanded a view of the whisperers.

They were two, a man and a woman. And the woman was of all people Dymphna! She had her back to me, but she stood in the moonlight, and I knew her hood in a moment. The man—surely the man was Van Tree then, if the woman was Dymphna? I stared, feeling sure it must be Van Tree. It was wonderful enough that Dymphna should so far have regained nerve and composure as to rise and come out to meet him. But in that case her conduct, though strange, was explicable. If not, however, if the man were not Van Tree——

By heavens, he certainly was not. Stare as I might, rub my eyes as I might, I could not alter the man's figure, which was of the tallest; whereas I have said that the young Dutchman was short. This man's face, too, though it was obscured, as he bent over the girl, by his cloak, which was pulled high up about his throat, was swarthy; swarthy and beardless, I judged. More, his cap had a feather, and even as he stood still, I thought I read the soldier in his attitude. The soldier and the Spaniard!

What did it mean? On what strange combination had I lit? Dymphna and a Spaniard!

Impossible. Yet a thousand doubts and thoughts ran riot in my brain, a thousand conjectures jostled one another to get uppermost. What was I to do? What ought I to do? Go nearer to them, as near as possible, and listen and learn the truth? Or steal back the way I had come, and fetch Master Lindstrom? But first, was it certain that the girl was there of her own free-will? The question was answered as soon as put. The man laid his hand gently on her shoulder. She did not draw back.

Confident of this, and consequently of Dymphna's bodily safety, I hesitated. I was beginning to consider whether the best course might not be to withdraw and say nothing, leaving the question of future proceedings to be decided after I had spoken to her on the morrow, when a movement diverted my thoughts. The man at last raised his head. The moonlight fell cold and bright on his face, displaying every feature as clearly as if it had been day. And though I had only once seen his face before, I knew it again.

And knew him! In a second I was back in England, looking on a far different scene. I saw the Thames, its ebb tide rippling in the sunshine as it ripples past Greenwich, and a

small boat gliding over it, and a man in the bow of the boat, a man with a grim lip and a sinister eye. The tall soldier talking to Dymphna in the moonlight, his cap the cap of a Spanish guard, was Master Clarence, the Duchess's chief enemy!

I stayed my foot. With a strange settling into resolve of all my doubts I felt if my sword, which happily I had brought with me, was loose in its sheath, and leaned forward scanning him. So he had tracked us! He was here! With wonderful vividness I pictured all the dangers which menaced the Duchess, Master Bertie, the Lindstroms, myself, through his discovery of us, all the evils which would befall us if the villain went away with his tale. Forgetting Dymphna's presence, I set my teeth hard together. He should not escape me this time.

But man can only propose. As I took a step forward, I trod on a round piece of wood which turned under my foot, and I stumbled. My eye left the pair for a second. When it returned to them they had taken the alarm. Dymphna had started away, and I saw her figure retreating swiftly in the direction of the house. The man poised himself a moment irresolute op-

posite to me: then dashed aside and disappeared behind the cottage.

I was after him on the instant, my sword out, and caught sight of his cloak as he whisked round a corner. He dodged me twice round the next cottage, the one nearer the river. Then he broke away and made for the bridge, his object evidently to escape from the island. But he seemed at last to see that I was too quick for him—as I certainly was—and should catch him half-way across the narrow planking; and changing his mind again he doubled nimbly back and rushed into the open porch of a cottage, and I heard his sword ring out. I had him at bay.

At bay indeed! But ready as I was, and resolute to capture or kill him, I paused, hesitating to run in on him. The darkness of the porch hid him, while I must attack with the moonlight shining on me. I peered in cautiously. "Come out!" I cried. "Come out, you coward!" Then I heard him move, and for a moment I thought he was coming, and I stood a-tiptoe waiting for his rush. But he only laughed a derisive laugh of triumph. He had the odds, and I saw he would keep them.

I took another cautious step towards him, and keeping my point well advanced, and shad-

ing my eyes with my left hand, tried to make him out. As I did so, gradually his face took dim form and shape, confronting mine in the darkness. I stared yet more intently. The face became more clear. Nay, with a sudden leap into vividness, as it were, it grew white against the dark background—white and whiter. It seemed to be thrust out nearer and nearer, until it almost touched mine. It—his face? No, it was not his face! For one awful moment a terror which seemed to still my heart glued me to the ground where I stood, as it flashed upon my brain that it was another face that grinned at me so close to mine, that it was another face I was looking on: the livid blood-stained face and stony eyes of the man I had killed!

With a wild scream I turned and fled. By instinct, for terror had deprived me of reason, I hied to the bridge, and keeping, I knew not how, my footing upon the loose clattering planks, made one desperate rush across it. The shimmering water below, in which I saw that face a thousand times reflected, the breeze which seemed the dead man's hand clutching me, lent wings to my flight. I sprang at a bound from the bridge to the bank, from the bank to the boat, and overturning, yet never seeing, my startled companion, shoved off

from the shore with all my might—and fell a-crying.

A very learned man, physician to the Queen's Majesty, has since told me, when I related this strange story to him, that probably that burst of tears saved my reason. It so far restored me at any rate that I presently knew where I was—cowering in the bottom of the boat with my eyes covered: and understood that Master Lindstrom was leaning over me in a terrible state of mind, imploring me in mingled Dutch and English to tell him what had happened. "I have seen him!" was all I could say at first, and I scarcely dared remove my hands from my eyes. "I have seen him!" I begged my host to row away from the shore, and then, and then only, was able to tell him what the matter was, he sitting the while with his arm round my shoulder.

"You are sure that it was the Spaniard?" he said kindly, after reflecting a minute.

"Quite sure," I answered, shuddering yet with less violence. "How could I be mistaken? If you had seen him——"

"And you are sure—did you feel his heart this morning? Whether it was beating?"

"His heart?" Something in Master Lindstrom's voice gave me courage to look up, though

I still shunned the water lest that dreadful visage should rise from the depths. "No, I did not touch him."

"And you tell me that he fell on his face. Did you turn him over?"

"No." I saw his drift now. I was sitting erect. My brain began to work again. "No," I admitted. "I did not."

"Then how—" the Dutchman asked, roughly—"how do you know that he was dead, young sir? Tell me that."

When I explained, "Bah!" he cried. "There is nothing in that! You jumped to a conclusion. I thought a Spaniard's head was harder to break. As for the blood coming from his mouth, perhaps he bit his tongue, or did any one of a hundred things—except die, Master Francis. That you may be sure is just what he did not do."

"You think so?" I said gratefully. I began to look about me, yet still with a tremor in my limbs, and an inclination to start at shadows.

"Think?" he rejoined, with a heartiness which brought conviction home to me; "I am sure of it. You may depend upon it that Clarence, or the man you take for Clarence—who no doubt was the other soldier seen with the scoundrel this morning—found him hurt late in the evening.

Then, seeing him in that state, he put him in the porch for shelter, either because he could not get him to Arnheim at once, or because he did not wish to give the alarm before he had made his arrangements for netting your party."

"That is possible!" I allowed, with a sigh of relief. "But what of Clarence?"

"Well," the old man said; "let us get home first. We will talk of him afterwards."

I felt he had more in his mind than appeared, and I obeyed; growing ashamed of my panic, and looking forward with no very pleasant feelings to hearing the story narrated. But when we reached the house, and found Master Bertie and the Duchess in the parlour waiting for us—they rose, startled at sight of my face—he bade me leave that out, but tell the rest of the story.

I complied, describing how I had seen Dymphna meet Clarence, and what I had seen to pass between them. The astonishment of my hearers may be imagined. "The point is very simple," our host said coolly, when I had in the face of many exclamations and some incredulity completed the tale; "it is just this! The woman certainly was not Dymphna. In the first place, she would not be out at night. In the second place, what could she know of your Clarence, an Eng-

lishman and a stranger? In the third place, I will warrant she has been in her room all the evening. Then if Master Francis was mistaken in the woman, may he not have been mistaken in the man? That is the point."

"No," I said boldly. "I only saw her back. I saw his face."

"Certainly that is something," Master Lindstrom admitted reluctantly.

"But how many times had you seen him before?" put in my lady very pertinently. "Only once."

In answer to that I could do no more than give further assurance of my certainty on the point. "It was the man I saw in the boat at Greenwich," I declared positively. "Why should I imagine it?"

"All the same, I trust you have," she rejoined. "For if it was indeed that arch scoundrel we are undone."

"Imagination plays us queer tricks sometimes," Master Lindstrom said, with a smile of much meaning. "But come, lad, I will ask Dymphna, though I think it useless to do so. For whether you are right or wrong as to your friend, I will answer for it you are wrong as to my daughter."

He was rising to go from the room for the purpose, when Mistress Anne opened the door and came in. She looked somewhat startled at finding us all in conclave. "I thought I heard your voices," she explained, timidly standing between us and the door. "I could not sleep."

She looked, indeed, as if that were so. Her eyes were very bright, and there was a bright spot of crimson in each cheek. "What is it?" she went on abruptly, looking hard at me and shutting her lips tightly. There was so much to explain that no one had taken it in hand to begin, and our silence perhaps seemed strange.

"It is just this," the Duchess said, opening her mouth with a snap. "Have you been with Dymphna all the time?"

"Yes, of course," was the prompt answer.

"What is she doing?"

"Doing?" Mistress Anne repeated in surprise. "She is asleep."

"Has she been out since nightfall?" the Duchess continued. "Out of her room! Or out of the house?"

"Out? Certainly not. Before she fell asleep she was in no state to go out, as you know, though I hope she will be all right when she awakes. Who says she has been out?" Anne

added sharply. She looked at me with a challenge in her eyes, as much as to say, "Is it you?"

"I am satisfied," I said, "that I was mistaken as to Mistress Dymphna. But I am just as sure as before that I saw Clarence."

"Clarence?" Mistress Anne repeated, starting violently, and the colour for an instant fleeing from her cheeks. She sat down on the nearest seat.

"You need not be afraid, Anne," my lady said, smiling. She had a wonderfully high courage herself. "I think Master Francis was mistaken, though he is so certain about it."

"But where—where did he see him!" the girl asked. She still trembled.

Once more I had to tell the tale, Mistress Anne, as was natural, listening to it with the liveliest emotions. And this time so much of the ghost story had to be introduced—for she pressed me closely as to where I had left Clarence, and why I had let him go—that my assurances got less credence than ever.

"I think I see how it is," she said at last, with a saucy scorn that hurt me not a little. "Master Carey's nerves are in much the same state to-night as Dymphna's. He thought he saw a ghost,

and he did not. He thought he saw Dymphna, and he did not. And he thought he saw Master Clarence, and he did not."

"Not so fast, child!" cried the Duchess sharply, seeing me wince. "Your tongue runs too freely. No one has had better proofs of Master Carey's courage—for which I will answer myself—than we have!"

"Then he should not say things about Dymphna!" the young lady retorted, her foot tapping the floor, and the red spots back in her cheeks. "Such rubbish I never heard!"

CHAPTER XI.

A FOUL BLOW.

THEY none of them believed me, it seemed; and smarting under Mistress Anne's ridicule, hurt by even the Duchess's kindly incredulity, what could I do? Only assert what I had asserted already, that it was undoubtedly Clarence, and that before twenty-four hours elapsed they would have proof of my words.

At mention of this possibility Master Bertie looked up. He had left the main part in the

discussion to others, but now he intervened. "One moment!" he said. "Take it that the lad is right, Master Lindstrom. Is there any precaution we can adopt, any back door, so to speak, we can keep open, in case of an attempt to arrest us being made? What would be the line of our retreat to Wesel?"

"The river," replied the Dutchman promptly.

"And the boats are all at the landing-stage?"

"They are; and for that reason they are useless in an emergency," our host answered thoughtfully. "Knowing the place, any one sent to surprise and arrest us would secure them first, and the bridge. Then they would have us in a trap. It might be well to take a boat round, and moor it in the little creek in the further orchard," he added, rising. "It is a good idea, at any rate. I will go and do it."

He went out, leaving us four—the Duchess, her husband, Anne, and myself—sitting round the lamp.

"If Master Carey is so certain that it was Clarence," my lady began, "I think he ought to——"

"Yes, Kate?" her husband said. She had paused and seemed to be listening.

"Ought to open that letter he has!" she con-

tinued impetuously. "I have no doubt it is a letter to Clarence. Now the rogue has come on the scene again, the lad's scruples ought not to stand in the way. They are all nonsense. The letter may throw some light on the Bishop's schemes and Clarence's presence here; and it should be read. That is what I think."

"What do you say, Carey?" her husband asked, as I kept silence. "Is not that reasonable?"

Sitting with my elbows on the table, I twisted and untwisted the fingers of my clasped hands, gazing at them the while as though inspiration might come of them. What was I to do? I knew that the three pairs of eyes were upon me, and the knowledge distracted me, and prevented me really thinking, though I seemed to be thinking so hard.

"Well," I burst out at last, "the circumstances are certainly altered. I see no reason why I should not——"

Crash!

I stopped, uttering an exclamation, and we all sprang to our feet.

"Oh, what a pity!" the Duchess cried, clasping her hands. "You clumsy, clumsy girl! What have you done?"

Mistress Anne's sleeve, in some movement she had made, had swept from the table a Florentine jug, one of Master Lindstrom's greatest treasures, and it lay in a dozen fragments on the floor. We stood and looked at it, the Duchess in anger, Master Bertie and I in comic dismay. The girl's lip trembled, and she turned quite white as she contemplated the ruin she had caused.

"Well, you have done it now!" the Duchess said pitilessly. What woman could ever overlook clumsiness in another woman! "It only remains to pick up the pieces, miss. If a man had done it—but there, pick up the pieces. You will have to make your tale good to Master Lindstrom afterwards."

I went down on my knees and helped Anne, the annoyance her incredulity had caused me forgotten. She was so shaken that I heard the bits of ware in her hand clatter together. When we had picked up all, even to the smallest piece, I rose, and the Duchess returned to the former subject.

"You will open this letter, then?" she said; "I see you will. Then the sooner the better. Have you got it about you?"

"No, it is in my bedroom," I answered. "I hid it away there, and I must fetch it. But do you

think," I continued, pausing as I opened the door for Mistress Anne to go out with her double handful of fragments, "that I am fully justified in reading it?"

"Most certainly," my lady answered, gravely nodding with each syllable, "I think so. I will be responsible." And Master Bertie nodded also.

"So be it," I said reluctantly. I was turning to leave the room to fetch the letter—my bedroom being in a different part of the house, only connected with the main building by a covered passage—when our host returned. He told us that he had removed a boat, and I stayed awhile to hear if he had anything more to report; and then, finding he had not, went out to go to my room, shutting the door behind me.

The passage I have mentioned, which was merely formed of rough planks, was very dark. At the nearer end was the foot of the staircase leading to the upper rooms. Farther along was a door in the side opening into the garden. Going straight out of the lighted room, I had almost to grope my way, feeling the walls with my hands. When I had about reached the middle I paused. It struck me that the door into the garden must be open, for I felt a cold draught of air strike my brow, and saw, or fancied I saw, a

slice of night sky and the branch of a tree waving against it. I took a step forward, slightly shivering in the night air as I did so, and had stretched out my hand with the intention of feeling for the door and closing it, when a dark form rose suddenly close to me, I saw a knife gleam in the starlight, and the next moment I reeled back into the darkness of the passage, a sharp pain in my breast.

I knew at once what had happened to me, and leaned a moment against the planking with a sick, faint feeling, saying to myself, "I have it this time!" The attack had been so sudden and unexpected, I was taken so completely off my guard, that I had made no attempt either to strike or to clutch my assailant, and I suppose only the darkness of the passage saved me from another blow. But was one needed? The hand which I had raised instinctively to shield my throat was wet with the warm blood trickling fast down my breast. I staggered back to the door of the parlour, groped blindly for the latch, seemed to be an age finding it, found it at last, and walked in.

The Duchess sprang up at sight of me.

"What," she cried, backing from me, "what has happened?"

"I have been stabbed," I said; and I sat down.

It amused me afterwards to recall what they all did. The Dutchman stared, my lady screamed loudly, Master Bertie whipped out his sword; he could make up his mind quickly enough at times.

"I think he has gone," I said, faintly.

The words brought the Duchess to her knees by my chair. She tore open my doublet, through which the blood was oozing fast. I made no doubt that I was a dead man, for I had never been wounded in this way before, and the blood scared me. I remember my prevailing idea was a kind of stunned pity for myself. Perhaps later—I hope so—I should have come to think of Petronilla and my uncle and other people. But before this stage was reached, the Duchess reassured me.

"Courage, lad," she cried heartily. "It is all right, Dick. The villain struck him on the breast-bone an inch too low, and has just ripped up a scrap of skin. It has blooded him for the spring, that is all. A bit of plaster——"

"And a drink of strong waters," suggested the Dutchman, soberly—his thoughts were always to the point when they came.

"Yes, that too," quoth my lady, "and he will be all right."

I thought so myself when I had emptied the cup they offered me. I had been a good deal shaken by the events of the day. The sight of blood had further upset me. I really think it possible I might have died of this slight hurt and my imagination if I had been left to myself. But the Duchess's assurance and the draught of Schnaps, which seemed to send new blood through my veins, made me feel ashamed of myself. If the Duchess would have let me, I would at once have gone to search the premises; as it was, she made me sit still while she ran to and fro for hot water and plaster, and the men searched the lower rooms and secured the door afresh.

"It is very strange. Could you see nothing of him?" our host asked me, when he and Master Bertie returned, weapons in hand. "Nothing of his figure or face, my lad?"

"Nothing, save that he was short," I answered; "shorter than I am, at any rate, and I fancy a good deal."

"A good deal shorter than you are?" my lady said uneasily; "that is no clue. In this country

nine people out of ten are that. Clarence, now, is not."

"No," I said; "he is about the same height. It was not Clarence."

"Then who could it be?" she muttered, rising, and then with a quick shudder sitting down again. "Heaven help us, we seem to be in the midst of foes! What could be the motive? And why should the villain have selected you? Why pick you out?"

On that a strange thing happened. Three pairs of English eyes met, and signalled a common message eye to eye. No word passed, but the message was "Van Tree!" When we had glanced at one another we looked all of us at our host—looked somewhat guiltily. He was deep in thought, his eyes on the stove; but he seemed to feel our gaze upon him, and he looked up abruptly. "Van Tree," he said, and stopped.

"You know him well," the Duchess said, appealing to him softly. We felt a kind of sorrow for him, and some delicacy, too, in accusing one of his countrymen of a thing so cowardly. "Do you think it is possible," she continued with an effort, "possible that he can have done this, Master Lindstrom?"

"I have known him from a boy," the merchant

said, looking up, a hand on either knee, and speaking with a simplicity almost majestic, "and never knew him do a mean thing, madam. I know no more than that." And he looked round on us.

"That is a good deal; still, he went off in a fit of jealousy when Master Carey brought Dymphna home. We must remember that."

"Yes, I would he knew the rights of that matter," said the Dutchman, heartily.

"And he has been hanging about the place all day," my lady persisted.

"Yes," Master Lindstrom rejoined patiently; "yet I do not think he did this."

"Then who did?" she asked, somewhat nettled.

That was the question. I had my opinion, as I saw Master Bertie and the Duchess had. I did not doubt it was Van Tree. Yet a thought struck me. "It might be well," I suggested, "that some one should ask Mistress Anne whether the door was open when she left the room. She passed out just in front of me."

"But she does not go by the door," my lady objected.

"No, she would turn at once and go upstairs," I agreed. "But she could see the door from the foot of the stairs—if she looked that way, I mean."

The Duchess assented, and went out of the room to put the question. We three, left together, sat staring at the dull flame of the lamp, and were for the most part silent, Master Bertie only remarking that it was after midnight. The suspicion he and I entertained of Van Tree's guilt seemed to raise a barrier between us and our host. My wound, slight as it was, smarted and burned, and my head ached. After midnight, was it? What a day it had been!

When the Duchess came back, as she did in a few minutes, both Anne and Dymphna came with her. The girls had risen hastily, and were shivering with cold and alarm. Their eyes were bright, their manner was excited. They were full of sympathy and horror and wonder, as was natural; of nervous fear for themselves, too. But my lady cut short their exclamations, saying merely, "Anne says she did not notice the door."

"No," the girl answered, trembling visibly as she spoke. "I went up straight to bed. But who could it be? Did you see nothing of him as he struck you? Not a feature? Not an outline?"

"No," I murmured.

"Did he not say a word?" she continued with strange insistence. "Was he tall or short?" Her dark eyes dwelling on mine seemed to probe my

thoughts, as though they challenged me to keep anything back from her. "Was it the man you hurt this morning?" she suggested.

"No," I answered reluctantly. "This man was short."

"Short was he? Was it Master Van Tree, then?"

We, who felt almost certain that it was Van Tree, started nevertheless at hearing the charge put into words before Dymphna. I wondered, and I think the others did too, at Mistress Anne's harshness. Even my lady, so blunt and outspoken by nature, had shrunk from trying to question the Dutch girl about her lover. We looked at Dymphna, wondering how she would take it.

We had forgotten that she could not understand English. But this did not serve her; for without a pause Mistress Anne turned to her, and unfalteringly said something in her scanty Dutch which came to the same thing. A word or two of questioning and explanation followed. Then the meaning of the accusation dawned at last on Dymphna's mind. I looked for an outburst of tears or protestations. Instead, with a glance of wonder and great scorn, with a single indignant widening of her beautiful eyes, she replied by a curt Dutch sentence.

"What does she say?" my lady exclaimed, eagerly.

"She says," replied Master Lindstrom, who was looking on gravely, "that it is a base lie, madam."

On that we became spectators. It seemed, I think, to all of us, that the two girls stood apart from us in a circle of light by themselves; confronting one another with sharp glances as though a curtain had been raised from between them, and they saw one another in their true colours and recognised some natural antagonism, or, it might be, some rivalry each in the other. I think I was not peculiar in feeling this, for we all kept silence for a space as though expecting something to follow. In the middle of this silence there came a low rapping at the door.

One uttered a faint shriek; another stood as if turned to stone. The Duchess cried for her child. The rest of us looked at one another. Midnight was past. Who could be abroad? Who could want us at this hour? As a rule we should have been in bed and asleep long ago. We had no neighbours save the cotters on the far side of the island. We knew of no one likely to arrive at this time with any good intent.

"I will open," said Master Lindstrom. But

he looked doubtfully at the women-folk as he said it.

"One minute," the Duchess whispered. "That table is solid and heavy. Could you not——"

"Put it across the door?" concluded her husband. "Yes, we will." And it was done at once, the two men—my lady would not let me help—so arranging it that it prevented the door being opened to its full width.

"That will stop a rush," Master Bertie said with satisfaction.

It did strengthen the position, yet it was a nervous moment when our host prepared to lower the bar. "Who is there?" he cried loudly.

We waited, listening and looking at one another, the fear of arrest and the horrors of the Inquisition looming large in the minds of some of us at least. The answer, when it came, did not reassure us. It was uttered in a voice so low and muffled that we gained no information, and rather augured treachery the more. I remember noticing how each took the crisis: how Mistress Anne's face was set hard, and her breath came in jerks; how Dymphna, pale and trembling, seemed yet to have eyes only for her father; how the Duchess faced the entrance like a queen at bay. All this I took in at a glance. Then my gaze returned to

Master Lindstrom, as he dropped the bar with a jerk. The door was pushed open at once as far as it would go. A draught of cold air came in, and with it Van Tree. He shut the door behind him.

Never were six people so taken aback as we were. But the newcomer, whose face was flushed with haste and excitement, observed nothing. Apparently he saw nothing unexpected even in our presence downstairs at that hour; nothing hostile, or questioning in the half-circle of astonished faces turned towards him. On the contrary, he seemed pleased.

"Ah!" he exclaimed gutturally. "It is well! You are up! You have taken the alarm!"

It was to me he spoke, and I was so surprised by this, and by his sudden appearance, so dumb-founded by his easy address and the absence of all self-consciousness on his part, so struck by a change in him, that I stared in silence. I could not believe that this was the same half-shy, half-fierce young man who had flung away a few hours before in a passion of jealousy. My theory that he was the assassin seemed on a sudden extravagant, though here he was on the spot. When Master Lindstrom asked "Alarm! What alarm?" I listened for his answer as I should have listened

for the answer of a friend and ally, without hesitation, without distrust. For in truth the man was transfigured; changed by the rise of something to the surface which ordinarily lay hid in him. Before, he had seemed churlish, awkward, a boor. In this hour of our need and of his opportunity he showed himself as he was. Action and purpose lifted him above his outward seeming. I caught the generous sparkle in his eye, and trusted him.

"What!" he said, keeping his voice low. "You do not know? They are coming to arrest you. Their plan is to surround the house before day-break. Already there is a boat lying in the river watching the landing-stage."

"Whom are they coming to arrest?" I asked. The others were silent, looking at this strange messenger with mingled feelings.

"All, I fear," he replied. "You too, Master Lindstrom. Some one has traced your English friends hither and informed against you. I know not on what ground you are included, but I fear the worst for you. There is not a moment to be lost if you would escape by the bridge, before the troops who are on the way to guard it arrive."

"The landing-stage, you say, is already watched?" our host asked, his phlegmatic cool-

ness showing at its best. His eyes roved round the room, and he tugged, as was his habit when deep in thought, at his beard. I felt sure that he was calculating which of his possessions he could remove.

"Yes," Van Tree answered. "My father got wind of the plan in Arnheim. An English envoy arrived there yesterday on his way to Cleves, or some part of Germany. It is rumoured that he has come out of his road to inquire after certain English fugitives whom his government are anxious to seize. But come, we have no time to lose! Let us be off! Let us go!"

"Do you come too?" Master Lindstrom said, pausing in the act of turning away. He spoke in Dutch, but by some inspiration born of sympathy I understood both his question and the answer.

"Certainly, I come," the young man answered gallantly. "Where Dymphna goes I go, and where she stops I stop, though it be at Madrid itself." His eye kindled, and he seemed to grow taller and to gain majesty. The barrier of race, which had hindered me from viewing him fairly before, fell in a trice. I felt now only a kindly sorrow that he had done this noble thing, and not I. I went to him and grasped his hand; and though I

said nothing, he seemed after a single start of surprise to understand me fully. He understood me even better, if that were possible, an hour later, when Dymphna had told him of her adventure with the Spaniard, and he came to me to thank me.

Ordered myself to be idle, I found all busy round me, busy with a stealthy diligence. Master Lindstrom was packing his plate. Dymphna, pale, but with soft happy eyes—for had she not cause to be proud?—was preparing food and thick clothing. The Duchess had fetched her child and was dressing it for the journey. Master Bertie was collecting small matters and looking to our arms. In one or other of these occupations—I can guess in which—Van Tree was giving his aid. And so, since the Duchess would not let me do anything, it chanced that presently I found myself left alone for a few minutes with Anne.

I was not watching her. I was gnawing my nails in a fit of despondency, reflecting that I was nothing but a hindrance and a drawback to my friends, since whenever a move had to be made I was sure to be invalided, when I became aware, through some mysterious sense, that my companion, who was kneeling on the floor behind me, packing, had desisted from her work and was

gazing fixedly at me. I turned. Yes, she was looking at me; her eyes, in which a smouldering fire seemed to burn, contrasting vividly with her pale face and contracted brows. When she saw that I had turned—of which at first she did not seem aware—she rose and came to me, and laid a hand on my shoulder and leaned over me. A feeling that was very like fright fell upon me, her manner was so strange. “What is it?” I stammered, as she still pored on me in silence, still maintained her attitude. “What is the matter, Anne?”

“Are you *quite* a fool?” she whispered, her voice almost a hiss, her hot breath on my cheek. “Have you no sense left that you trust that man?”

For a moment I failed to understand her. “What man?” I said. “Oh, Van Tree!”

“Ay, Van Tree! Who else? Will you go straight into the trap he has laid for you?” She moistened her lips with her tongue, as though they were parched. “You are all mad! Mad, I think! Don’t you see,” she continued, stooping over me again, and whispering hurriedly, her wild eyes close to mine, “that he is jealous of you?”

“He was,” I said uneasily. “That is all right now.”

"He was? He is!" she retorted. "He went away wild with you. He comes back smiling and holding out his hand. Do you trust him? Don't you see—don't you see," she cried, rocking me to and fro with her hand in her excitement, "that he is fooling you? He is leading us all into a trap that has been laid carefully enough. What is this tale of an English envoy on his way to Germany? Rubbish! Rubbish, I tell you."

"But, Clarence——"

"Bah! It was all your fancy!" she cried fiercely, her eyes for the moment flitting to the door, then returning to my face. "How should he find us here? Or what has Clarence to do with an English envoy?"

"I do not know," I said. She had not in the least persuaded me, for in a rare moment I had seen into Van Tree's soul and trusted him implicitly. "Please take care," I added, wincing under her hand. "You hurt me!"

She sprang back with a sudden change of countenance as if I had struck her, and, for a moment, cowered away from me, fear and her former passion seeming to fight for the mastery in her face. I set down her condition to terror at the plight we were all in, or to vexation that no one would take her view. The next moment

however, I went farther. I thought her mad when she turned abruptly from me, and, flying to the door by which Van Tree had entered, began, with trembling fingers, to release the pin which confined the bar.

“Stop! stop! you will ruin all!” I cried in horror. “They can see that door from the river, and if they discern the light they will know we are up and have taken the alarm; and they may make a dash to secure us. Stop, Anne! Stop!” I cried. But the girl was deaf. She tugged desperately at the pin, and had already loosened the bar when I caught her by the arms, and, pushing her away, set my back against the door. “Don’t be foolish!” I said gently. “You have lost your head. You must let us, who are men, settle these things, Anne.”

She was beside herself indeed, for she faced me during a second or two as though she would spring upon me and tear me from the door. Her hands worked, her eyes gleamed, her strong white teeth showed themselves. I shuddered. I had never pictured her looking like that. Then, as steps sounded on the stairs, and cheerful voices—cheerful they seemed to me as they broke in on that strange scene—drew nearer, she turned and,

walking deliberately to a seat, fell to weeping hysterically.

"What are you doing to that door?" the Duchess cried sharply, as she entered with the others. I was securing the bar again.

"Nothing," I said, stolidly. "I am seeing that it is fast."

"And hoity, toity, Miss!" she continued, turning to Anne. "What has come over you I would like to know. Stop crying, girl; what is the matter with you? Will you shame us all before this Dutch maid? Here, carry these things to the back door."

Anne somehow stifled her sobs and rose. Seeming by a great effort to recover composure, she went out, keeping her face to the last averted from me.

We all followed, variously laden, Master Lindstrom and Van Tree, who carried between them the plate-chest, being the last to leave. There was not one of us—even of us who had only known the house a few weeks—who did not heave a sigh as we passed out of the warm lamp-lit parlour, which, littered as it was with the *débris* of packing, looked still pleasant and comfortable in comparison with the darkness outside, and the uncertain future before us. What, then, must

have been the pain of parting to those who had never known any other home? Yet they took it bravely. To Dymphna Van Tree's return had brought great happiness. To Master Lindstrom any ending to a long series of anxieties and humiliations was welcome. To Van Tree—well, he had Dymphna with him, and his side of the plate-chest was heavy and gave him ample employment.

We passed out silently through the back door, leaving the young Dutchman to lock it behind us, and flitted, a line of gliding shadows, through the orchard. It was two o'clock; the sky was overcast; a slight drizzle was falling. Once an alarm was given that we were being followed, and we huddled together, and stood breathless, a clump of dark figures gazing affrightedly at the tree trunks which surrounded us, and which seemed—at least to the women's eyes—to be moving, and to be men closing in on us. But the alarm was groundless, and with no greater mishap than a few stumbles when we came to the slippery edge of the creek, we reached the boat; and one by one, admirably ordered by our host, got in and took our seats. Van Tree and Master Lindstrom pushed us off, and then swung themselves in and paddled warily along, close under the bank, where

the shadows of the poplars fell across us, and our figures blended darkly with the line of rushes on the shore.

CHAPTER XII.

ANNE'S PETITION.

WE coasted along in this silent fashion, nearly as far as the hamlet and bridge, following, but farther inshore, the course which Master Lindstrom and I had taken when on our way to bury the Spaniard. A certain point gained, at a signal from our host we struck out into the open, and rowed swiftly towards the edge of the marsh. This was the critical moment; but, so far as we could learn, our passage was unnoticed. We reached the fringe of rushes; with a prolonged hissing sound the boat pushed through them; a flight of water-fowl rose, whirring and clapping about us, and we floated out into a dim, misty lake, whose shores and surface stretched away on every side, alike dark, shifting, and uncertain.

Across this the Dutchman steered us, bringing us presently to a narrow opening, through which we glided into a second and smaller mere. At the farther end of this the way seemed barred by

a black, impenetrable wall of rushes, which rose far above our heads. But the tall stems bent slowly with many a whispered protest before our silent onset, and we slid into a deep water-lane, here narrow, there widening into a pool, in one place dark, in another reflecting the grey night sky. Down this we sped swiftly, the sullen plash of the oars and the walls of rushes always with us. For ourselves who were not rowing, we crouched still and silent, shivering and listening for sounds of pursuit; now starting at the splash of a frog, or again shuddering at the cry of a night-bird. The Duchess, her child, and I were in the bows, Master Lindstrom, his daughter, and Mistress Anne in the stern. They had made me comfortable with the baggage and some warm coverings, and would insist on treating me as helpless. Even when the others began to talk in whispers, the Duchess enjoined silence on me, and bade me sleep. Presently I did so, my last impression one of unending water-ways and shoreless, shadowy lakes.

When I awoke the sun was high and the scene was changed indeed. We lay on the bosom of a broad river, our boat seeming now to stand still as the sail flapped idly, now to heel over and shoot forward as the light breeze struck us. The

shores abreast of us were still low and reedy, but ahead the slopes of green wooded hills rose gently from the stream. Master Bertie was steering, and, seeing me lift my head, greeted me with a smile. The girls in the stern were covered up and asleep. Amidships, too, Master Lindstrom and Van Tree had curled themselves up between the thwarts, and were slumbering peacefully. I turned to look for the Duchess, and found her sitting wide awake at my elbow, her eyes on her husband.

"Well," she said, smiling, "do you feel better now? You have had a good sleep."

"How long have I been asleep, please?" I asked, bewildered by the sunshine, by the shining river and the green hills, by the fresh morning air, by the change in everything; and answering in a question, as people freshly aroused do nine times out of ten. "Where are we?"

"You have been asleep nearly six hours, and we are on the Rhine, near Emmerich," she answered, smiling. She was pale, and the long hours of watching had drawn dark circles round her eyes. But the old undaunted courage shone in them still, and her smile was as sweet as ever.

"Have we passed the frontier?" I asked, eagerly.

"Well, nearly," she answered. "But how does your wound feel?"

"Rather stiff and sore," I said ruefully, after making an experiment by moving my body to and fro. "And I am very thirsty, but I could steer."

"So you shall presently," she said. "Only first eat something. We broke our fast before the others lay down. There are bread and meat behind you, and some hollands and water in the bottle."

I seized the latter and drank greedily. Then, finding myself hungry, now I came to think about it, I fell upon the eatables.

"You will do now, I think," she said, when she had watched me for some time.

I laughed for answer, pleased that the long dark night, its gloom and treachery, were past. But its memories remained, and presently I said, "If Van Tree did not try to kill me—and I am perfectly sure he did not——"

"So am I," she said. "We were all wrong."

"Then," I continued, looking at her gravely, "who did? that is the question. And why?"

"You are sure that it was not the Spaniard whom you hurt in defence of Dymphna?"

"Quite sure."

"And sure that it was not Clarence?" she persisted.

"Quite sure. It was a short man," I explained again, "and dressed in a cloak. That is all I can tell about him."

"It might be some one employed by Clarence," she suggested, her face gloomy, her brows knit.

"True, I had not thought of that," I answered "And it reminds me. I have heard so much of Clarence——"

"And seen some little—even that little more than was good for you."

"Yes, he has had the better of me on two occasions, I must allow. But I was going to ask you," I continued, "to tell me something about him. He was your steward, I know. But how did he come to you? How was it you trusted him?"

"We are all fools at times," she answered grimly. "We wanted to have persons of our own faith about us, and he was highly commended to us by Protestants abroad, as having seen service in the cause. He applied to us just at the right moment too. And at the first we felt a great liking for him. He was so clever in arranging things; he kept such excellent order among the servants; he was so ready, so willing, so plausible! Oh!" she added bitterly, "he had ways that enabled him to twist nine women out of ten

round his fingers! Richard was fond of him; I liked him; we have talked more than once of how we might advance his interests. And then, like a thunderbolt on a clear day, the knowledge of his double-dealing fell upon us. We learned that he had been seen talking with a known agent of Gardiner, and this at a time when the Bishop was planning our ruin. We had him watched, and just when the net had all but closed round us we discovered that he had been throughout in Gardiner's pay."

"Ah!" I said viciously. "The oddest thing to me is the way he has twice escaped me when I had him at the sword's point!"

"The third time may bring other fortune, Master Francis," she answered, smiling. "Yet be wary with him. He is a good swordsman, as my husband, who sometimes fenced with him, will tell you."

"He can be no common man," I said.

"He is not. He is well-bred, and has seen service. He is at once bold and cunning. He has a tongue that would win most women, and a hardihood that would chain them to him. Women love bold men," my lady added, naïvely. And she smiled on me—yet humorously—so that I blushed.

There was silence for a moment. The sail flapped, then filled again. How delicious this morning, after that night, this bright expanse after the dark sluggish channels! Far away in front a great barge, high-laden with a mighty stack of rushes, crept along beside the bank, the horse that drew it covered by a kind of knitted rug. When my lady spoke next, it was abruptly. "Is it Anne?" she asked.

I knew quite well what she meant, and blushed again. I shook my head.

"I think it was going to be," she said sagely, "only Mistress Dymphna came upon the scene. You have heard the story of the donkey halting between two bundles of hay, Master Francis? And in the multitude of sweethearts there is safety."

"I do not think that was my case," I said. Instinctively my hand went to my breast, in which Petronilla's velvet sword-knot lay safe and warm. The Duchess saw the gesture, and instantly bent forward and mimicked it. "Ha! ha!" she cried, leaning back with her hands clasped about her knees, and her eyes shining with fun and amusement. "Now I understand. You have left her at home; now, do not deny it, or I will tell the others. Be frank, and I will keep your secret, on my honour."

"She is my cousin," I said, my cheeks hot.

"And her name?"

"Petronilla."

"Petronilla?" my lady repeated, shrewdly. "That was the name of your Spanish grandmother, then?"

"Yes, madam."

"Petronilla? Petronilla?" she repeated, stroking her cheek with her hand. "She would be before my time, would she not? Yet there used to be several Petronillas about the court in Queen Catherine of Aragon's days, I remember. There was Petronilla de Vargas for one. But there, I guess at random. Why do you not tell me more about yourself, Master Francis? Do you not know me well enough now?"

"There is nothing to tell, madam," I said in a low voice.

"Your family? You come, I am sure, of a good house."

"I did, but it is nothing to me now. I am cut off from it. I am building my house afresh. And," I added bitterly, "I have not made much way with it yet."

She broke, greatly to my surprise, into a long peal of laughter. "Oh, you vain boy!" she cried. "You valiant castle-builder! How long have you

been about the work? Three months. Do you think a house is to be built in a day? Three months, indeed! Quite a lifetime!"

Was it three months? It seemed to me to be three years. I seemed to have grown more than three years older since that February morning when I had crossed Arden Forest with the first light, and looked down on Wootton Wawen sleeping in its vale, and roused the herons fishing in the bottoms.

"Come, tell me all about it!" she said abruptly. "What did you do to be cut off?"

"I cannot tell you," I answered.

A shade of annoyance clouded her countenance. But it passed away almost on the instant. "Very well," she said, with a little nod of disdain and a pretty grimace. "So be it. Have your own way. But I prophesy you will come to me with the tale some day."

I went then and took Master Bertie's place at the tiller; and, he lying down, I had the boat to myself until noon, and drew no little pleasure from the placid picture which the moving banks and the wide river presented. About noon, there was a general up-rising; and, coming immediately afterwards to a little island lying close to the

bank, we all landed to stretch our legs and refresh ourselves after the confinement on board.

"We are over the border now and close to Emmerich," Master Lindstrom said, "though the mere line of frontier will avail us little if the Spanish soldiers can by hook or crook lay hands on us! Therefore, we must lose no time in getting within the walls of some town. We should be fairly secure for a few days either in Wesel or Santon."

"I thought Wesel was the point we were making for," Master Bertie said in some surprise.

"It was Wesel I mentioned the other day," the Dutchman admitted frankly. "And it is the bigger town and the stronger. But I have more friends in Santon. To Wesel the road from Emmerich runs along the right bank. To Santon we go by a cross-country road, starting from the left bank opposite Emmerich, a road longer and more tedious. But we are much less likely to be followed that way than along the Wesel road, and on second thoughts I incline to Santon."

"But why adopt either road? Why not go on by river?" I asked.

"Because we should be overtaken. The wind is falling, and the boat," our host explained more truly than politely, "with the women in it is heavy."

"I understand," I said. "And you feel sure we shall be pursued?"

For answer he pointed with a smile to his plate-chest. "Quite sure," he added. "With that before them they will think nothing of the frontier. I fancy that for you, if the English Government be in earnest, there will be no absolutely safe place short of the free city of Frankfort. Unless indeed you have interest with the Duke of Cleves."

"Ah!" said the Duchess. And she looked at her husband.

"Ah!" said Master Bertie, and he looked very blankly at his wife. And as neither said any more, I did not derive much comfort from that suggestion.

"Then it is Santon, is it?" said my lady.

"That first, at any rate. Then, if they follow us along the Wesel road, we shall be able to give them the slip."

So it was settled, neither Van Tree nor the girls having taken any part in the discussion. The former and Dymphna were talking aside, and Mistress Anne was sitting low down on the bank with her feet almost in the water, immersed to all appearance in her own thoughts. There was a little bustle as we rose to get into the boat, which

we had drawn up on the landward side of the island so as to be invisible from the main channel; and in the middle of this I was standing with one foot in the boat and one on shore taking from Anne various articles which we had landed for rearrangement, when she whispered to me that she wanted to speak to me alone.

"I want to tell you something," she said, raising her eyes to my face, and then averting them. "Will you follow me this way?"

She strolled as if without purpose twenty or thirty paces along the bank, and in a minute I joined her. I found her gazing down the river in the direction from which we had come. "What is it?" I said anxiously. "You do not see anything, do you?" For there had been a hint of bad news in her voice.

She dropped the hand with which she had been shading her eyes and turned to me. "Master Francis, you will not think me very foolish?" she said. Then I perceived that her lip was quivering and that there were tears in her eyes. They were very beautiful eyes when, as now, they grew soft, and appeal took the place of challenge.

"What is it?" I replied, speaking cheerfully to reassure her. She had scarcely got over her terror of last night. She trembled as she stood,

"It is about Santon," she answered with a miserable little catch in her voice. "I am so afraid of going there! Master Lindstrom says it is a rough long road, and when we are there we are not a bit farther from those wretches than at Wesel, and—and——"

"There, there!" I said. She was on the point of bursting into tears, and was clearly much overwrought. "You are making the worst of it. If it were not for Master Lindstrom I should be inclined to choose Wesel myself. But he ought to know best."

"But that is not all," she said, clasping her hands and looking up at me with her face grown full of solemn awe. "I have had a dream."

"Well, but dreams——" I objected.

"You do not believe in dreams?" she said, dropping her head sorrowfully.

"No, no; I do not say that," I admitted, naturally startled. "But what was your dream?"

"I thought we took the road to Santon. And mind," she added earnestly, "this was before Master Lindstrom had uttered a word about going that way, or any other way save to Wesel. I dreamt that we followed the road through such a dreadful flat country, a country all woods and

desolate moorland, under a grey sky, and in torrents of rain, to———”

“Well, well?” I said, with a passing shiver at the picture. She described it with a rapt, absent air, which made me creep—as if even now she were seeing something uncanny.

“And then I thought that in the middle of these woods, about half-way to Santon, they overtook us, and there was a great fight.”

“There would be sure to be that!” I muttered, with shut teeth.

“And I thought you were killed, and we women were dragged back! There, I cannot tell you the rest!” she added wildly. “But try, try to get them to go the old way. If not, I know evil will come of it. Promise me to try?”

“I will tell them your dream,” I said, thinking that would satisfy her.

“No, no!” she exclaimed still more vehemently. “They would only laugh. Madam does not believe in dreams. But they will listen to you if you say you think the other way better. Promise me you will! Promise me!” she pleaded, her hands clasping my arm, and her tearful eyes looking up to mine.

“Well,” I agreed reluctantly—it was not easy to refuse her—“I will try. After all, the shortest

way may be the best. But if I do," I said kindly, "you must promise me in return not to be alarmed any longer, Anne."

"I will try," she said gratefully; "I will indeed, Francis."

We were summoned at that minute, for the boat was waiting for us. The Duchess scanned us rather curiously as we ran up—we were the last. But Anne kept her word, and concealed her fears so bravely that as she jumped in from the bank her air of gaiety almost deceived me, and would have misled the sharpest-sighted person who had not been present at our interview, so admirably was it assumed.

We calculated that our pursuers would not follow us down the river for some hours. They would first have to search the island, and the watch which they had set on the landing-stage would lead them to suspect that we had fled by land. We hoped, therefore, to reach Emmerich unmolested. There Master Lindstrom said we could get horses; and he thought we might be safe in Santon by the following evening.

"If you really think we had better go to Santon," I said. This was an hour or two after leaving the island, and when we looked to sight Emmerich very soon, the hills which we had seen

in front all day, and which were grateful to eyes sated with the monotony of Holland, being now pretty close to us.

"I thought that we had settled that," replied the Dutchman, promptly.

I felt they were all gazing at me. "I look at it this way," I said, reddening. "Wesel is not far from Emmerich by the road. Should we not have an excellent chance of reaching it before our pursuers came up?"

"You might reach it," Master Lindstrom said, gravely. "Though, again, you might not."

"And, Wesel once reached," I persisted, "there is less fear of violence being attempted there than in Santon. It is a larger town."

True," he admitted. "But it is just this. Will you be able to reach Wesel? It is the getting there—that is the difficulty; the getting there before you are caught."

"If we have a good start, why should we not?" I urged; and I urged it the more persistently the more I found them opposed to it. Naturally there ensued a warm discussion. At first they all sided against me, save of course Anne, and she sat silent, though she was visibly agitated, as from minute to minute I or they seemed likely to prevail. But presently, when I grew warmer, and

urged again and again the strength of Wesel, my own party veered round, yet still with doubt and misgiving. The Dutchman shrugged his shoulders to the end and remained unpersuaded. But finally it was decided that I should have my own way. We would go to Wesel.

Every one knows how a man feels when he comes victorious out of such a battle. He begins on the instant to regret his victory and to see the possible evils which may result from it; to repent the hot words he has used in the strife and the declarations he has flung broadcast. That dreadful phrase, "I told you so!" rises like an avenging fury before his fancy. And he quails.

I felt all this the moment the thing was settled. But I was too young to back out and withdraw my words. I hoped for the best, and resolved inwardly to get the party mounted the moment we reached Emmerich.

I soon had the opportunity of proving this resolution to be more easily made than carried out. About three o'clock we reached the little town, dominated, as we saw from afar, by an ancient minster; and, preferring not to enter it, landed at the steps of an inn a quarter of a mile short of the gates, and marking a point where we might take the road to Wesel, or, crossing the

river, the road to Santon. Master Lindstrom seemed well known, but there were difficulties about the horses. The German landlord listened to his story with apparent sympathy—but no horses! We could not understand the tongue in which the two talked, but the Dutchman's questions, quick and animated for once, and the landlord's slow replies, reminded me of the foggy morning when in a similar plight we had urged the master of the *Lion's Whelp* to put to sea. And I feared a similar result.

"He says he cannot get so many horses tonight," said Master Lindstrom, with a long face.

"Offer him more money!" quoth the Duchess.

"If we cannot have horses until the morning we may as well go on in the boat," I urged.

"He says, too, that the water is out on the road," the Dutchman answered.

"Nonsense! Double the price!" cried my lady, impatiently.

I suppose that this turned the scale, for the landlord finally promised that in an hour four saddle-horses for Master Bertie and the Duchess, Anne and myself, should be ready, with a couple of pack-horses and a guide. Master Lindstrom, his daughter, and Van Tree, would start a little later for Cleves, five miles on the road to Santon,

if conveyance could be got. "And if not," our host added, as we said something about our unwillingness to leave him in danger, "I shall be safe enough in the town here; but I hope to sleep in Cleves."

It was all settled very hastily. We felt—and I in particular, since my plan had been adopted—a reasonable impatience to be off. As we stood on the bank by the inn-door, we had a straight reach of river a mile long in full view below us; and now we were no longer moving ourselves, but standing still, I expected each minute to see the Spanish boat with its crew of desperadoes sweep round the corner before our eyes. Master Lindstrom assured us that if we were once out of sight our pursuers would get no information as to the road we had taken either from the innkeeper or his neighbours. "There is no love lost between them and the Spaniards," he said, shrewdly. "And I know the people here, and they know me. The burghers may not be very keen to come to blows with the Spaniards or to resent any foray on their part. But the latter, on their side, will be careful not to go too far or to make themselves obnoxious."

We took the opportunity of supping then, not

knowing when we might get food again. I happened to finish first, and, hearing the horses' hoofs, went out and watched the lads who were to be our guides fastening the baggage on the sumpter beasts. I gave them a hand—not without a wince or two, for the wound in my chest was painful—and while doing so had a flash of remembrance. I went to the unglazed window of the kitchen in which the others sat, and leaned my elbows on the sill. “I say!” I said, full of my discovery, “there is something we have forgotten!”

“What?” asked the Duchess, rising and coming towards me, while the others paused in their meal to listen.

“The letter to Mistress Clarence,” I answered. “I was going to get it when I was stabbed, you remember, and afterwards we forgot all about it. Now it is too late. It has been left behind.”

She did not answer at once, but came out to me, and turned with me to look at the horses. “This comes of your foolish scruples, Master Francis,” she said severely. “Where was it?”

“I slipped it between the leathers of the old haversack you gave me,” I answered, “which I used to have for a pillow. Van Tree brought my

things down, but overlooked the haversack, I suppose. At any rate, it is not here."

"Well, it is no good crying over spilt milk," she said.

She called the others out then, and there was no mistaking Mistress Anne's pleasure at escaping the Santon road. She was radiant, and vouchsafed me a very pretty glance of thanks, in which her relief as well as her gratitude shone clearly. By half-past four we had got, wearied as we were, to horse, and with three hours of daylight before us hoped to reach Wesel without mishap. But for most of us the start was saddened by the parting—though we hoped it would be only for a time—from our Dutch friends. We remembered how good and staunch they had been to us. We feared—though Master Lindstrom would not hear of it—that we had brought misfortune upon them, and neither the Duchess's brave eyes nor Dymphna's blue ones were free from tears as they embraced. I wrung Van Tree's hand as if I had known him for months instead of days, for a common danger is a wondrous knitter of hearts; and he only smiled—though Dymphna blushed—when I kissed her cheek. A few broken words, a last cry of farewell, and we four, with our two guides behind us, moved down the Wesel road, the last I heard

of our good friends being Master Lindstrom's charge, shouted after us, "to beware of the water if it was out!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WILFUL MAN'S WAY.

ONLY to feel that we were moving was a relief, though our march was very slow. Master Bertie carried the child slung in a cloak before him, and, thus burdened, could not well go beyond a smooth amble, while the guides, who were on foot, and the pack-horses, found this pace as much as they could manage. A little while, and the exhilaration of the start died away. The fine morning was followed by a wet evening, and before we had left Emmerich three miles behind us Master Bertie and I had come to look at one another meaningly. We were moving in a dreary, silent procession through heavy rain, with the prospect of the night closing in early. The road, too, grew more heavy with each furlong, and presently began to be covered with pools of water. We tried to avoid this inconvenience by resorting to the hill slopes on our left, but found the attempt a waste of time, as a deep stream or backwater,

bordered by marshes, intervened. The narrow road, raised but little above the level of the swiftly flowing river on our right, turned out to be our only possible path; and when Master Bertie discerned this his face grew more and more grave.

We soon found, indeed, as we plodded along, that a sheet of water which palely reflected the evening light was taking the place of the road; and through this we had to plash and plash at a snail's pace, one of the guides on a pack-horse leading the way, and Master Bertie, in charge of his wife, coming next; then, at some distance, for her horse did not take kindly to the water, the younger woman followed in my care. The other guide brought up the rear. In this way, stopped constantly by the fears of the horses, which were scared by the expanse of flood before them, we crept wearily on until the moon rose. It brought, alas! an access of light, but no comfort! The water seemed continually to grow deeper, the current on our right swifter; and each moment I dreaded the announcement that further advance was impossible.

It seemed to have come to that at last, for I saw the Duchess and her husband stop and stand

waiting for me, their dark shadows projected far over the moonlit surface.

"What is to be done?" Master Bertie called out as we moved up to them. "The guide tells me that there is a broken piece of road in front which will be impassable with this depth of water."

I had expected to hear this; yet I was so dumfounded—for, this being true, we were lost indeed—that for a time I could not answer. No one had uttered a word of reproach, but I knew what they must be thinking. I had brought them to this. It was my foolish insistence had done it. The poor beast under me shivered. I struck him with my heels. "We must go forward," I said, desperately. "Don't you think so? Or what? What do you think? Go back?"

"Steady! steady, my knight errant!" the Duchess cried in her calm, brave voice. "I never knew you so bad a counsellor before!"

"It is my fault that you are here," I said, looking dismally round.

"Perhaps the other road is as bad," Master Bertie replied. "At any rate, that is past and gone. The question is, what are we to do now? To remain here is to die of cold and misery. To go back may be to run into the enemy's arms. To go forward——"

"Will be to be drowned!" Mistress Anne cried, with a pitiful sob.

I could not blame her. A more gloomy outlook than ours, as we sat on our jaded horses in the middle of this waste of waters, which appeared in the moonlight to be boundless, could scarcely be imagined. The night was cold for the time of year, and the keen wind pierced our garments and benumbed our limbs. At any moment the rain might begin afresh, and the moon be overcast. Of ourselves, we could not take a step without danger, and our guides had manifestly lost their heads and longed only to return.

"Yet I am for going forward," the Duchess pronounced, bravely. "If there be but this one bad place we may pass it with care."

"We may," her husband assented dubiously. "But suppose when we have passed it we can go no farther, and find our retreat cut off! Suppose the——"

"It is no good supposing!" she retorted with some sharpness. "Let us cross this place first, Richard, and we will deal with the other when we come to it."

He nodded assent, and we moved slowly forward, compelling the guides to go first. In this order we waded some hundred yards, through

water which grew deeper with each step, until it rose nearly to our girths. Then the lads stopped.

"Are we over?" said the Duchess, eagerly.

For answer one of them pointed to the flood before him, and peering forward I made out a current sweeping silently and swiftly across our path—a current with an ominous rush and swirl.

"Over?" grunted Master Bertie. "No, this is the place. See, the road has given way, and the stream is pouring through from the river. I expect it is getting worse every minute as the banks crumble."

We all craned forward, looking at it. It was impossible to say how deep the water was, or how far the deep part might extend. And we had with us a child and two women.

"We must go back!" Master Bertie said resolutely. "There is no doubt about it. The flood is rising. If we do not take care, we shall be cut off, and be able to go neither backwards nor forwards. I cannot see a foot of dry land as it is, before or behind us."

He was right. Far and wide, wherever our eyes could reach, the moonlight was reflected in a sheet of water. We were nearly up to our girths in water. On one side was the hurrying river, on

the other were the treacherous depths of the backwater. I asked the guide as well as I could whether the road was good beyond. He answered, trembling, that he did not know. He and his companion were so terrified that we only kept them beside us by threats.

"I fear we must go back," I said, assenting sorrowfully.

Even the Duchess agreed; and we were in the act of turning to retrace our steps with what spirit we might, when a distant sound brought us all to a standstill again. The wind was blowing from the quarter whence we had come—from Emmerich; and it brought to us the sound of voices. We all stopped and listened. Yes, they were voices we heard—loud, strident tones, mingled with sullen plash of horses tramping through the water. I looked at the Duchess. Her face was pale, but her courage did not fail her. She understood in a trice that the danger we had so much dreaded and so long avoided was upon us—that we were followed, and the followers were at our heels; and she turned her horse round again. Without a word she spurred it back towards the deep part. I seized Anne's rein and followed, notwithstanding that the poor girl in her terror would have resisted. Letting the guides go

as they pleased, we four in a moment found ourselves abreast again, our horses craning over the stream, while we, with whip and spur, urged them on.

In cold blood we should scarcely have done it. Indeed, for a minute, as our steeds stumbled, and recovered themselves, and slid forward, only to draw back trembling—as the water rose above our boots or was flung by our fellows in our eyes and all was flogging and scrambling and splashing, it seemed as if we were to be caught in a trap, despite our resolve. But at last Master Bertie's horse took the plunge. His wife's followed; and both, partly floundering and partly swimming, set forward, snorting the while in fear. To my joy I saw them emerge safely not ten yards away, and, shaking themselves, stand comparatively high out of the water.

"Come!" my lady cried, imperatively, as she turned in her saddle with a gesture of defiance. "Come! It is all right."

Come, indeed! I wanted nothing better, for I was beside myself with passion. But, flog as I might, I could not get Anne's brute to take the plunge. The girl herself could give me no aid; clinging to her saddle, pale and half-fainting, she could only beg me to leave her, crying out again

and again in a terrified voice that she would be drowned. With her cry there suddenly mingled another, the hail of our pursuers as they sighted us. I could hear them drawing nearer, and I grew desperate. Luckily they could not make any speed in water so deep, and time was given me for one last furious effort. It succeeded. My horse literally fell into the stream; it dragged Anne's after it. How we kept our seats, how they their footing, I never understood; but, somehow, splashing and stumbling and blinded by the water dashed in our faces, we came out on the other side, where the Duchess and her husband, too faithful to us to save themselves, had watched the struggle in an agony of suspense. I did but fling the girl's rein to Master Bertie, and then I wheeled my horse to the stream again. I had made up my mind what I must do. "Go on," I cried waving my hand with a gesture of farewell. "Go on! I can keep them here for a while."

"Nonsense!" I heard the Duchess cry, her voice high and shrill. "It is——"

"Go on!" I cried. "Go on! Do not lose a moment or it will be useless."

Master Bertie hesitated. But he, too, saw that this was the only chance. The Spaniards were better mounted than we were; they were on the

brink of the stream now, and must, if they passed it, overtake us easily. He hesitated, I have said, for a moment. Then he seized his wife's rein and drew her on, and I heard the three horses go splashing away through the flood. I threw a glance after them over my shoulder, bethinking me that I had not told the Duchess my story, and that Sir Anthony and Petronilla would never—but, pish! What was I thinking of? That was a thought for a woman. I had only to harden my heart now, and set my teeth together. My task was very simple indeed. I had just to keep these men—there were four—here as long as I could, and, if possible, stop Clarence's pursuit altogether.

For I had made no mistake. The first man to come up was Clarence—Clarence himself. He let fall a savage word as his horse stopped suddenly with its fore feet spread out on the edge of the stream, and his dark face grew darker as he saw the swirling eddies, and me standing fronting him in the moonlight with my sword out. He discerned at once, I think, the strength of my position. Where I stood the water was scarcely over my horse's fetlocks. Where he stood it was over his horse's knees. And between us it flowed nearly four feet deep.

He held a hasty parley with his companions. And then he hailed me. "Will you surrender?" he cried in English. "We will give you quarter."

"Surrender? To whom?" I said. "And why—why should I surrender? Are you robbers and cutpurses?"

"Surrender in the name of the Emperor, you fool!" he answered sternly and roughly.

"I know nothing about the Emperor!" I retorted. "What Emperor?"

"In the Queen's name, then!"

"The Duke of Cleves is Queen here!" I cried. "And as the flood is rising," I added scornfully, "I would advise you to go home again."

"You would advise us, would you? Who are *you*, I would like to know?" he replied, in a kind of wrathful curiosity.

I gave him no answer. I have often since reflected, with a fuller knowledge of certain facts, that no stranger interview ever took place than this short colloquy between us, that no stranger fight ever was fought than that which we contemplated as we stood there bathed in the May moonlight, with the water all round us and the cold sky above. A strange fight indeed it would have been between him and me, had it ever come to the sword's point!

But it did not. His last words had scarcely rung out when my horse began to quiver under me and sway backwards and forwards. I had just time to take the alarm, before the poor beast sank down and rolled gently over, leaving me bestriding its body, my feet in the water. Whatever the cause of its death, I had to disentangle myself, and that quickly, for the four men opposite me, seeing me dismounted, plunged with a cry of triumph into the water, and began to flounder across. Without more ado I stepped forward to keep the ford.

The foremost and nearest to me was Clarence, whose horse began halfway across to swim. It was still scrambling to regain its footing when it came within my reach, and I slashed it cruelly across the nostrils. It turned in an instant on its side. I saw the rider's face gleam white in the water, his stirrup shone a moment as the horse rolled over, then in a second the two were gone down the stream. It was done so easily, so quickly, it amazed me. One gone! With a shout I turned quickly to the others, who were on the point of landing. My blood was fired, and my yell of victory as I dashed at them scared back two of the horses. Despite their riders' urging, they turned and scrambled out on the side from

which they had entered. Only one was left, the farthest from me. He got across indeed, but was the most unlucky of all, for his horse stumbled on landing, came down heavily on its head, and flung him at my very feet.

It was no time for quarter—I had to think of my friends; and while with one hand I seized the flying rein as the horse scrambled trembling to its feet, with the other I lunged twice at the rider as he half-tried to rise, half-tried to grasp at me. The second time I ran him through, and he screamed shrilly. In those days I was young and hot-headed, and I answered only by a shout of defiance as I flung myself into the saddle and dashed away through the water after my friends.

Væ victis! I had done enough to check the pursuit, and had yet escaped myself. If I could join the others again, what a triumph it would be! I had no guide, but neither had those in front of me; and luckily at this point a row of pollard willows defined the line between the road and the river. Keeping this on my right, I made good way. The horse seemed strong under me, the water was shallow, and appeared to be growing more so, and presently across the waste of flood I discerned before me a dark, solitary tower, the tower seemingly of a church, for it was topped

by a stumpy spire, which daylight would probably have shown to be of wood.

There was a little dry ground round the church, a mere patch in a sea of water, but my horse rang its hoofs on it with every sign of joy, and arched its neck as it trotted up to the neighbourhood of the church, whinnying with pleasure. From the back of the building—I was not surprised—came an answering neigh. As I pulled up, a man, his weapon in his hand, came from the porch, and a woman followed him. I called to them gaily. “I fancied you would be here the moment I saw the church!” I said, sliding to the ground.

“Thank Heaven you are safe!” the Duchess answered; and then, to my astonishment, she flung her arms round my neck and kissed me. “What has happened?” she asked, looking in my eyes, her own full of tears.

“I think I have stopped them,” I answered, turning suddenly shy, though, boylike, I had been longing a few minutes before to talk of my victory. “They tried to cross, and——”

I had not sheathed my sword. Master Bertie caught my wrist, and lifting the blade looked at it. “So, so!” he said, nodding. “Are you hurt?”

“Not touched!” I answered.

Before more was said he compelled his wife to go back into the porch. The wind blew keenly across the open ground, and we were all wet and shivering. When we had fastened up the horse, we followed the Duchess. The door of the church was locked, it seemed, and the porch afforded the best shelter to be had. Its upper part was of open woodwork, and freely admitted the wind; but wide eaves projected over these openings, and over the door, so that at least it was dry within. By huddling together on the floor against the windward side we got some protection. I hastily told what had happened.

“So Clarence is gone!” My lady’s voice as she said the words trembled, but not in sorrow or pity as I judged. Rather in relief. Her dread and hatred of the man were strange and terrible, and so seemed to me then. Afterwards, I learned that something had passed between them which made almost natural such feelings on her part, and made natural also a bitter resentment on his. But of that no more. “You are quite sure,” she said—pressing me anxiously for confirmation—“that it was he!”

“Yes. But I am not sure that he is dead,” I explained.

"You seem to bear a charmed life yourself," she said.

"Hush!" her husband cried quickly. "Do not say that to the lad. It is unlucky. And now do you think," he continued—the porch was in darkness, and we could scarcely make out one another's faces—"that there is any further chance of pursuit?"

"Not by that party to-night," I said grimly. "Nor, I think, to-morrow."

"Good!" he answered. "For I can see nothing but water ahead, and it would be madness to go on by night without a guide. We must stay here until morning, whatever the risk."

He spoke gloomily--and with reason. Our position was a miserable, almost a desperate one, even on the supposition that pursuit had ceased. We had lost all our baggage, food, wraps. We had no guides, and we were in the midst of a flooded country, with two tender women and a baby, our only shelter the porch of God's house. Mistress Anne, who was crouching in the darkest corner next the church, seemed to have collapsed entirely. I remembered afterwards that I did not once hear her speak that night. The Duchess tried to maintain our spirits and her own; but in the face of cold, damp, and hunger, she could do

little. Master Bertie and I took it by turns to keep a kind of watch, but by morning—it was a long night and a bitter one—we were worn out, and slept despite our misery. We should have been surprised and captured without a blow if the enemy had come upon us then.

I awoke at length with a start, to find the grey light of a raw misty morning falling upon, and showing up our wretched group. The Duchess's head was hidden in her cloak; her husband's was sunk on his breast; but Mistress Anne—I looked at her and shuddered. Had she sat so all night? Sat staring with that stony face of pain, and those tearless eyes, on the moonlight, on the darkness which had been before the dawn, on the cold first rays of morning? Stared on all alike, and seen none? I shuddered and peered at her, alarmed, doubtful, wondering, asking myself what this was, what had happened to her. Had fear and cold killed her, or turned her brain? "Anne!" I said timidly. "Anne!"

She did not answer nor turn; nor did the fixed gaze of her eyes waver. I thought she did not hear. "Anne!" I cried again, so loudly that the Duchess stirred, and muttered something in her sleep. But the girl showed no sign

of consciousness. I put out my hand and touched her.

She turned sharply and saw me, and in an instant drew her skirt away, with a gesture of such dread, loathing, repulsion as froze me; while a violent shudder convulsed her whole frame. Afterwards she seemed unable to withdraw her eyes from me, but sat in the same attitude, gazing at me with a fixed look of horror, as one might gaze at a serpent, while tremor after tremor shook her.

I was frightened and puzzled, and was still staring at her, wondering what I had done, or what had come to her, when a footstep fell on the road outside, and called away my attention. I turned from her to see a man's figure looming dark in the doorway. He looked at us—I suppose he had found the horses outside—gazing in great surprise at the queer group. I bade him good-morning in Dutch, and he answered as well as his astonishment would let him. He was a short, stout fellow, with a big face capable of expressing a good deal of astonishment, and the air of a peasant or farmer. "What do you here?" he continued, his guttural phrases tolerably intelligible to me.

I explained, as clearly as I could, that we

were on the way to Wesel. Then I awoke the Duchess and her husband, and, stretching our chilled and aching limbs, we went outside, the man still gazing at us. Alas! the day was not much better than the night. We could see but a very little way, a couple of hundred yards round us only. The rest was mist—all mist. We appealed to the man for food and shelter, and he nodded, and, obeying his signs rather than his words, we kicked up our starved beasts and plodded out into the fog by his side. Anne mounted silently and without objection, but it was plain that something strange had happened to her. Her condition was unnatural. The Duchess gazed at her very anxiously, and, getting no answers, or very scanty ones, to her questions, shook her head gravely.

But we were on the verge of one pleasure at least. When we reached the hospitable kitchen of the farm-house, it was joy indeed to stand before the great turf fire, and feel the heat stealing into our half-frozen bodies; to turn and warm back and front, while the good wife set bread and hot milk before us. How differently we three felt in half an hour? How the Duchess's eyes shone once more! How easily rose the laugh to our lips! Joy had indeed come with the morn-

ing. To be warm and dry and well fed after being cold and wet and hungry—what a thing this is!

But on one neither food nor warmth seemed to have any effect. Mistress Anne did indeed, in obedience to my lady's sharp words, raise her bowl to her lips. But she set it down quickly, and sat looking in dull apathy at the glowing peat. What had come over her?

Master Bertie went out with the farmer to attend to the horses, and when he came back he had news for us.

"There is a lad here," he said in some excitement, "who has just seen three foreigners ride past on the road along with two Germans on pack-horses; five in all. They must be three of the party who followed us yesterday."

I whistled. "Then Clarence got himself out," I said, shrugging my shoulders. "Well! well!"

"I expect that is so," Master Bertie answered, the Duchess remaining silent. "The question arises again, what is to be done now? We may follow them to Wesel, but the good man says the floods are deep between here and the town, and we shall have Clarence and his party before us all the way—shall perhaps run straight into their arms."

"What else can we do?" I said. "It is impossible to go back."

We held a long conference, and by much questioning of our host learned that half a league away was a ferry-boat, which could carry as many as two horses over the river at a time. On the farther side he said we might hit a road leading to Santon, three leagues distant. Should we go to Santon after all? The farmer thought the roads on that side of the river might not be flooded. We should then be in touch once more with our Dutch friends, and might profit by Master Lindstrom's advice, on which I for one was now inclined to set a higher value.

"The river is bank full. Are you sure the ferry-boat can cross?" I asked.

Our host was not certain. And thereupon an unexpected voice struck in.

"Oh dear, do not let us run any more risks!" it said.

It was Mistress Anne's. I turned and found she was herself again, trembling, excited, bright-eyed; as different as possible from the Anne of a few minutes before. A great change had come over her. Perhaps the warmth had done it, and the food.

A third course was suggested—to stay quietly

where we were. The farmhouse stood at some little distance from the road; and though it was rough—it was very rough, consisting only of two rooms, in one of which a cow was stalled—still it could furnish food and shelter. Why not stay there?

But the Duchess—wisely, I think—decided against this.

“It is unpleasant to go wandering again,” she said with a shiver. “But I shall not rest until we are within the walls of a town. Master Lindstrom laid so much stress on that. And I fancy that the party who overtook us last night are not the main body. Others will have gone to Wesel by boat perhaps, or along the other bank. There they will meet, and, learning we have not arrived, they will probably return this way and search for us.”

“Clarence——”

“Yes, if we have Clarence to deal with,” Master Bertie assented gravely, “we cannot afford to lose a point. We will try the ferry.”

It was something gained to start dry and warm. But the women's pale faces—for little by little the fatigue, the want of rest, the fear were telling even on the Duchess—were sad to see. I was sore and stiff myself. The wound I had re-

ceived so mysteriously had bled afresh, probably during last night's fight. We needed all our courage to put a brave face on the matter, and bear up and go out again into the air, which for the first week in May was cold and nipping. Suspense and anxiety had told in various ways on all of us. While I felt a fierce anger against those who were driving us to these straits, Master Bertie was nervous and excited, alarmed for his wife and child, and inclined to see an enemy in every bush.

However, we cheered up a little when we reached the ferry and found the boat could cross without much risk. We had to go over in two detachments, and it was nearly an hour past noon before we all stood on the farther bank and bade farewell to the honest soul whose help had been of so much importance to us. He told us we had three leagues to go, and we hoped to be at rest in Santon by four o'clock.

But the three leagues turned out to be more nearly five, while the road was so founderaus that we had again and again to quit it.

The evening came on, the light waned, and still we were feeling our way, so to speak—the women tired and on the verge of tears; the men muddy to the waist, savage, and impatient. It

was eight o'clock, and dusk was well upon us before we caught sight of the first lights of Santon, and, in fear lest the gates might be shut, pressed forward at such speed as our horses could compass.

"Do you go on, and keep the gates open!" the Duchess adjured us. "Anne and I will be safe enough behind you. Let me take the child, and do you ride on. We cannot pass the night in the fields."

The importance of securing admission was so great that Master Bertie and I agreed; and cantered on, soon outstripping our companions, and almost in the gloom losing sight of them. Dark masses of wood, the last remnants, apparently, of a forest, lay about the road we had to traverse. We were passing one of these, scarcely three hundred paces short of the town, and I was turning in the saddle to see that the ladies were following safely, when I heard Master Bertie, who was a bow-shot in front of me, give a sudden cry.

I turned round hastily to learn the reason, and was just in time to see three horsemen sweep into the road before him from the cover of the trees. They were so close to him—and they filled the road—that his horse carried him amongst

them almost before he could check it; or so it seemed to me. I heard their loud challenge, saw his arm wave, and guessed that his sword was out. I spurred desperately to join him, giving a wild shout of encouragement as I did so. Before I could come up, or indeed cross half the distance, the scuffle was over. One man fell headlong from his saddle, the horse fled riderless down the road, and at sight of this, or perhaps of me, the others turned tail without more ado and made off, leaving Master Bertie in possession of the field. The whole thing had passed in the shadow of the wood in less than half a minute. When I drew rein by him he was sheathing his sword.

"Is it Clarence?" I cried eagerly.

"No, no, I did not see him. I think not," he answered. He was breathing hard, and was very much excited. "They were poor swordsmen for Spaniards," he added. "Very poor," I thought.

I jumped off my horse, and, kneeling beside the man, turned him over. He was badly hurt, if not dying, cut across the neck. I looked hard at him by such light as there was, and did not recognise him as one of our assailants of the night before.

"I do not think he *is* a Spaniard," I said slowly.

Then a certain suspicion occurred to my mind, and I stooped lower over him.

"Not a Spaniard?" Master Bertie said stupidly. "How is that?"

Before I answered, I raised the man in my arms, and, carrying him carefully to the side of the road, set him with his back to a tree. Then I got quickly on my horse. The women were just coming up.

"Master Bertie," I said in a low voice, as I looked this way and that, to see if the alarm had spread, "I am afraid there is a mistake. But say nothing to them. It is one of the town-guard you have killed!"

"One of the town-guard!" he cried, a light bursting in on him, and the reins dropping from his hand. "What shall we do? We are lost, man, if what you say be true!"

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